

STRANGE CLUES

or

Chronicles of a City Detective.

by JAMES M^cGOVAN
Author
of

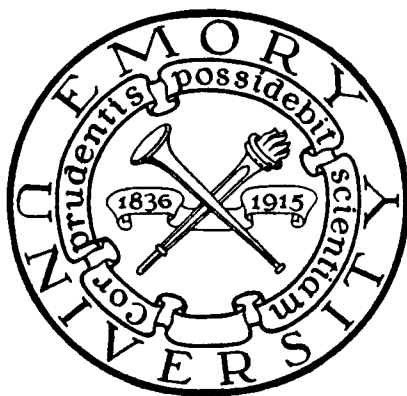
BROUGHT to BAY

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STRANGE CLUES;

OR,

Chronicles of a City Detective.

BY JAMES M'GOVAN,

AUTHOR OF "BROUGHT TO BAY" AND "HUNTED DOWN."

FIFTH EDITION.

EDINBURGH:
JOHN MENZIES AND COMPANY.
LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.

1884.

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WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

BROUGHT TO BAY;

OR,

EXPERIENCES OF A CITY DETECTIVE.

EIGHTH EDITION.

HUNTED DOWN;

OR,

RECOLLECTIONS OF A CITY DETECTIVE.

SIXTH EDITION.

The above are uniform in size and price with "STRANGE CLUES,"
and the three works form the complete set of M'Govan's Detective Stories.

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STRANGE CLUES.

“COPITAL!”

THEY say that when one hare is being chased by the hounds, another sometimes crosses the scent, and thus unwittingly leads the hounds to itself. We are so often called hounds, that it will do little harm if for the moment I admit the name to be correct, for the sake of illustrating the present exceptional case. I am not aware whether a crossed scent occurs frequently in hare hunting, not being a hare hunter myself; but among the few similar cases which have cropped up in my own peculiar hunting, the following stands out as worthy of notice.

One morning, about five o'clock, a policeman on the Canon-gate beat was found by the sergeant seated at the foot of a common stair, apparently fast asleep. The circumstance was so unlooked for—the man being particularly active and vigilant—that the sergeant stooped to make sure that it was he, and then was startled to find that the man's face was brutally mauled, and himself not asleep, but quite insensible from his injuries. He was carried home and attended to; but his condition was so critical, that we were instructed to look out sharply for his assailant. The man himself was quite unable to give us any information, but the policeman on the next beat speedily tendered the information that Fairley, the injured man, had reported to him having twice observed a thief known to us as “Tommy Cockhat,” loitering, and had announced his intention to “pounce upon him” if he turned up a third time. The rascal alluded to was well known to us all, having a weakness for strutting in a white waistcoat, and with his hat cocked jauntily on one side of his close-cropped head. Sometimes he was called “Hammy,” from the fact that his first conviction had been for stealing a ham; but on the whole the hat had the best of it. To find and arrest this man, then, would have been one of the easiest things in the world; but what good would the

arrest have done? Supposing the victim of his brutal fists and toe-plated boots should never recover consciousness—in a word, should die—he would be as safe as ourselves. It may not be generally known, but we aim more at securing convictions, than at merely arresting suspected men. My most earnest wish, then, was to collect evidence against Tommy, and if possible to collect that evidence from his own boastful lips. The man who is silly enough to be vain about his personal appearance is generally quite as eager to wag his tongue about what he considers his own cleverness. Of course, I did not expect Mr Tommy Cockhat to walk up to the office, and begin boasting of what he had done, for there his cleverness was not likely to be applauded. I wished to listen to his sentiments while he revelled in security among his own kind.

Now, the house most frequented by Tommy happened to be a public-house in the Canongate, the proprietor of which, with tender solicitude for the welfare and comfort of these patrons, had set apart a room for their use. This place was too far from the ground for any one to hope to overhear aught that passed within, and, being completely shut off from the other rooms, could not be approached from any side with hope of success, or without the occupants being made aware of the intrusion. In examining the room one day, however, it had struck me that our wish might be gratified in an odd manner, if ever occasion imperatively called for such an attempt. In the centre of the ceiling there had at one time been hanging a lustre, which had evidently been removed in favour of the more economical and modest gas bracket which now served to illuminate the room. A fancy centre-piece of plaster yet decorated the ceiling, and in this could be seen the pipe to which the lustre had been screwed. The absence of anything in the shape of a wooden peg, or other contrivance to prevent an escape of gas, convinced me that the lead pipe had long been disused or removed, and that my task would be easy on that score.

The time for such action had now come. Permission was accordingly obtained to use the room immediately above this reception room of eminent rascals—which was occupied as a dwelling-house—and I had the floor lifted in the centre, exactly at the spot where the pipe leading to the lustre had been cut off and removed. The scrap remaining, which was fastened to one of the flooring beams, after being straightened and widened a little at the top, served as a capital listening hole for me, and

at the same time gave me a view of about twelve inches of the beer-stained table directly below.

Regarding the immediate object of my listening, I may say that the whole preparations were fruitless, though Tommy was ultimately secured and convicted upon the evidence of the recovered policeman. But on the second night of my listening I came upon a crossed scent, and, thereafter, what I may fairly call a strange clue. Two men came into the room below me, and, having ordered beer and lit their pipes, told the waiter that if a "gentleman called Snoddy" should appear and ask for "two gentlemen as he was to see," he was to be shown up, and a third glass of beer brought for his consumption.

I did not find the conversation of the two men very interesting or edifying. Their faces, unfortunately, I could not see, and even their occasional allusions to each other as "Pete" and "Jemmy" did not give me the slightest inkling to their identity. Petes and Jemmys are as common among my "bairns," as Pats among the Irish, and the voices of the two below me were so strange to me, that I soon decided that they were comparatively fresh arrivals.

For some time after their arrival the two conversed in a low tone about the absent Snoddy, and speculated eagerly as to whether he had "got it" or no; and then they set upon their esteemed friend's character and tore it to rags, calling him "an extortionate cheat and swindler, who wanted as much for looking on as they would get for working, but who would maybe find himself mightily mistaken when it came to the squaring-up."

"We'll square him," remarked Pete, with a grim chuckle and a nudge across the table, which gave me a glimpse of his greasy coat sleeve. "We'll get rid on the stuff first, then pay ourselves second, and give him his share third. See?"

Jemmy did appear to see, for he poked Pete across the table, and laughed till some of the beer or smoke went down the wrong way, and pulled him up with a desperate fit of choking and coughing.

"Yes, last served don't always come off best," remarked Jemmy, and here it was that I began to take something like an interest in their plans. "And, besides, we have not on'y the work to do and the risk to bear, but the cloth to melt."

"Yes, an' we knows what cloth is to melt," grumpily added Pete. "'Tain't like wedge or dross, that can be shoved into the pot and so changed that no one 'ud know it. But cloth! who'll fence it an' give more'n a sixth its vally? And we daren't

have it made into togs, though I'm despit bad off for new ones, 'cause we'd be spotted and had up at the Central first time we showed our noses out of doors;" and having uttered this remark somewhat bitterly and resentfully, Mr Pete launched into a string of imprecations, which began with the absent Snoddy, and from him went back to his earliest progenitors.

These thieves, however, are not to be too harshly criticised for this species of wolfish ingratitude towards their friend, as the same practice obtains in the very highest circles in the land, even down to the warm and affectionate greeting which both men speedily awarded to the tout whom they had a few breaths earlier been cursing to his marrow bones. After a little, "Snoddy" appeared, and instantly had his dirty paw warmly wrung across the table by his companions; indeed, the three hands happened to meet exactly under my sight hole, and I began to wish that one at least of the three had been distinguished by some malformation or scar for after use to me. As soon as this touching proof of love was gone through, and Snoddy's beer had been brought in, with a pack of greasy cards to keep them from wearying, Pete launched into a somewhat fulsome eulogy of Snoddy's skill and knowingness, and concluded by confidently expressing a belief that upon this important occasion his knowingness had not been expended in vain. Snoddy's reply was an exclamation of delight, accompanied by a violent slapping of his leg; and, though I little thought it at the time, this exclamation was to prove my sole clue in the curious case which followed.

"Capital! capital! Go, that's dashed clever!" he cried, in a broad Scotch accent, evidently relishing the flattery with which he had just been bespattered.

The first word, I may say, was pronounced "Copital," and as the conversation proceeded I found that Snoddy had a kind of craze for using the word "Copital," and inserted it upon every available occasion, even when not particularly appropriate.

"I s'pose ye got all the partic'lars about the plant, with a plan o' the place, and the easiest way of getting in?" inquiringly interposed Jemmy.

"Yes; copital, man! copital!" exuberantly answered Snoddy, of whom I tried in vain to get a glimpse. "I saw the porter, who's an auld acquaintance o' mine, and pumped him dry. But it cost me three half gills, so ye'll need to pay me for them, forbye my share."

"Oh, yes, we'll pay ye for them," darkly returned Pete, with

I suspect a meaning glance at his companion, whereupon Jemmy emphatically added—

“In course; all expenses to be paid out of the funds.”

“Copital! That’s wise like,” delightedly answered Snoddy. “And here’s a plan o’ the place that I got the porter to write oot;” and he placed a turned envelope flat on the table, showing some scrawling lines on its surface, of which I, from my high perch, could make nothing. “It’s no very weel written, for the creatur’ was half drunk when he did it, but I can explain to ye what it means.”

“Fire away, then; go ahead,” said Pete, a little impatiently, and at the same moment the scalps of two close-cropped heads came forward almost within range of my peep-hole; but the faces being bent down over the paper, prevented anything like a sight of their features.

“Weel, this square place is the shop, and this wee place at the back is the cutting room. The tailors’ shops are below, but you’ll no likely bother wi’ them, unless ye want some auld iron, and care to take away a half dizzen o’ their guses. Ha, ha! Copital! copital!” and Snoddy laughed consumedly at his own joke, in which merriment the others politely joined.

“That’s all very well; we know ’bout as much as that already, but how the d—l are we to get in?” gruffly asked Pete.

“Oh, just wait a wee. I’ve arranged a’ thing, and the getting in is as easy as supping porridge,” said Snoddy, undismayed. “I tellt the porter that a friend o’ mine was thinking o’ buying the shop, so he described it a’ to me, as weel as if he had shown me owre the shop. At ae time the place was bigger, and the grocer’s next door was pairt o’ the shop. A wee bit o’ the partition wa’ that separates them is only ae brick thick, and ye’ll no find it ill to break through that. This mark on the plan shows where the weak bit is.”

“Then we’re to crack the grocer’s crib first,” said Peter, somewhat woefully. “That’s a nice easy job you’ve given us. Well, never mind, I ’spose it’s the best we can do.”

“Copital! ye’re richt there,” cried Snoddy, encouragingly. “The shop is owre strong for breaking into, wi’ iron bars on the back windows and iron shutters in front, but the grocer’s back window can be got in at as easy as lichting my pipe.”

“It’s all very easy to them as ain’t got to do it,” sourly answered Pete; to which Jemmy so far agreed as to say, “very easy.” “I think, the whole, that a good deal less’n the

third should be enough for your share. What d'ye say, now; will ye take half of the third when its all over?"

"Na, na! a bargain's a bargain," cunningly returned Snoddy, so far disapproving of the reduction as to forget to exclaim, "Copital!" as usual. "I maun hae fair share. A third's naething, seeing that it a' depended on me."

"S'pose we flings yer overboard, and pays ye as we like?" darkly suggested Pete; "what could ye do then?"

"Land ye baith in the Police Offis in ten meenits," promptly returned the affectionate and devoted Snoddy.

"Ye wouldn't do that? ye wouldn't turn traitor?" breathlessly exclaimed the thieves.

"Dae't? I wad dae't if ye wis my ain brithers. Ha, ha! copital, man! copital! A very guid joke o' us baith, for coorse it was only a joke; only ye maun expect to get as guid as ye gie."

"Very well; we'll stick to our agreement," said Pete, being unable at the moment to make anything better of it. "In course it was on'y a joke."

I thought I had now heard enough to justify me, if not in arresting all the three, at least in having their movements watched, and their place of abode ascertained, in event of any action coming of their plans; and hastily leaving my listening post, I got down to the front street. Some others had entered the room, and the interesting trio were about to leave as I came to this decision; but when I reached the street I was, first, at a loss whether to wait for them at the front or back door; and, second, after a pause in front, and an anxious rush round to the back, uncertain whether they had got out before me, or merely slipped into another box or room. To this day, indeed, I do not know how or when the three left the shop; but when I entered it carelessly a few minutes later in search of them, they were certainly not in the building. I could have asked for them by name, but as I was but too well known in the place, to do so would have at once alarmed the men and led to nothing so far as I was concerned; for as swift as my mouth shaped their names in inquiry, so swift would the news be wafted to their ears, "M'Govan's asking for you. Look out!" I therefore said nothing, but finished my glass of beer, and after a second saunter through the various rooms and several scowling or smiling greetings from known men, I left the place, resolved to try and trace the men if possible by their names.

Of this plan nothing came, as I had faintly feared, and that for two good reasons. When a robbery is in prospect, especially by thieves who are strangers in a town, and therefore the more likely to be noticed by professional ferrets, the really cunning keep themselves well hidden, knowing that in the hue and cry immediately following the crime they will certainly be pounced upon. I therefore was not surprised to discover nothing of Pete or Jemmy; and as for Snoddy, I had decided from the first that he was more a drunken loafer than a man living by crime alone. My only concern was for the intended victim, and to avert as far as possible coming danger I had every likely shop in the city warned of the distinguished visitors they were likely to receive. Here, however, perhaps from the shortness of the time at my disposal, or perhaps from an overlook, I made a signal blunder: I warned only the cloth merchants in Edinburgh.

On the third morning after the interesting interview, I was startled by news of a burglary having taken place at Leith, the details of which agreed so exactly with the scheme of Snoddy that I at once identified the work, and, of course, went down and had the porter of the establishment arrested on a charge of furnishing the thieves with a plan of the building and certain information as to its contents. The man was thoroughly frightened and awed, but he was so stupid and low in intellect that he either could not or would not recollect having an interview with Snoddy, or indeed the slightest knowledge of such a man. Probed sharply on the point by me, he admitted having a hazy recollection of being addressed by some such man, and treated to several glasses of whisky, but swore that he was too drunk at the time for any of the conversation which occurred to remain in his memory.

This was a severe blow for me, and the more irritating as the plunder not only amounted to about £200 worth of cloth and drapery goods, but to above £30 in bank-notes, which, though known by the numbers, might be paid in at any moment. More: I had foolishly expressed a conviction that I thought I could lay my hands on one at least of the gang—meaning Snoddy—and here I was left in the lurch, with only a stupid and quaking porter in charge, whom I knew it would be useless to try to seriously implicate. Again, when I came back to the office with the doleful intelligence that I believed I was helpless, our Lieutenant merely smiled, and said confidently to some one—“Oh, he knows more than he’s inclined to tell.

He'll certainly have them before long;” and no assurances of mine to the contrary could shake their confidence.

It was exactly at this point that my curious clue came in.

On the morning after that on which the robbery had been reported, I was standing in the Police Court helping to accelerate the business by hurrying the prisoners in and out as they were charged and dealt with, when one insolent prisoner, upon being fined in five shillings, or seven days, for being drunk, impudently addressed the bench with the words—

“Seven days? Dae ye think that fair? Hoo wad you like to be sentenced to seven days on bread an’ water if ye had ta’en a gless owre muckle last nicht?”

There was an instantaneous rumble of laughter among the audience; but above all the laughter, and even the sharp tones of the Fiscal ordering the prisoner back, there came to my ears the heavenly sound of the words—

“*Copital! copital!*”

I started round, pale to the ears with excitement, just as the magistrate wrathfully fixed the delinquent in the audience with his eye, and hurled out the words—“Silence there, in Court!” and there I saw the blotched face of a drunken toper of some fifty years, grinning delightedly, and quite unabashed by the rebuke of the bench.

I stared at the man—who did not see me—for some moments, with a fast beating heart, and trying hard to swiftly decide upon a course of action. It is true, I could have jumped forward and arrested him there and then; but I guessed that, like the gripping of the porter, the action would put me farther than ever from the actual burglars, while the plunder itself would probably never be seen or heard of. I wished to throw out a hook to catch both thieves and plunder, and was trying to decide how I could bait that hook with the estimable Snoddy himself. Unable to think of any better plan, I sat down and scribbled the following line to the Superintendent, and had it handed across to him.

“Please to have that man who shouted ‘*Copital!*’ detained and fined, however trifling the charge. I want him.” While this line was being read, the prisoner had been brought back and sentenced to other seven days for contempt of court—fourteen in all—without the option of a fine.

“Better make it fourteen years, while ye’re at it,” he recklessly remarked; whereupon the audience again tittered, and Snoddy boisterously shouted—

“ Copital, man! copital!”

At the same moment my line was handed to the bench, read slowly, and then the Sheriff simply nodded to me, and called the next case. While the prisoner next on the list was being brought in, I went through to the back part of the Court reserved for the audience, and stepping up behind my man, without touching him, said sharply and clearly—“Snoddy!”

Instantly his blotched face was turned in my direction, and his eyes scanned my face in uncertainty, as if trying in vain to discover in me an old acquaintance.

“Did you speak to me, sir?” he cringingly inquired.

“I did. Come through here; there’s a gentleman here wishes to speak to you.”

Snoddy seemed to hesitate, with a faint suspicion of coming trouble; but I quickened his motions in the direction of the bar, by collaring him and bundling him through with as hearty good will as I ever handled prisoner.

The case at the bar was speedily disposed of, and then, in spite of his voluble protest, Snoddy—whose whisky-laden breath would have “knocked a cuddy down”—was arraigned and charged with interrupting the business of the Court.

“Five shillings, or seven days,” was the calm reply to his whining entreaties. “Next case.”

“I havena fivepence in the world,” cried Snoddy, as I dragged him out, and hurried him down with my own hands to a separate cell, and saw him safely locked up.

“Very likely not,” was my dry rejoinder; “but you’ll have friends, I suppose?”

“No a friend in the blessed world,” he shouted.

“Then you won’t be missed for seven days,” was my feeling rejoinder, and there I left him.

In spite of his protest, however, he soon came to his senses, as I had anticipated, and decided that he had friends who could help him, and that whether they were likely to miss him or not, it were much better to be roaming the streets and hard ale shops in freedom, than pining in prison at the monotonous oakum picking or stone breaking. An hour or two after he was locked up, he very humbly asked for pen, ink, and paper, and then wrote out the following affectionate epistle, which he addressed to his dear friend, Pete:—

“i’ve got taken up, an’ fined for laffin in the police Court. please give Bearer five bob, an’ keep it off my share. it’ll save a lot of truble if you don’t refuse. You kno’ what i mean.
SNODDY.”

This emphatic note, which clearly proved that Snoddy could be stern as well as exuberantly facetious, was addressed outside to "Mr Pete Strelly, St Mary's Wynd;" and a simple-looking policeman being sent down to the cell to receive it, was minutely directed as to how he should find the proper house, the number of which Snoddy had never taken the trouble to ascertain. These directions being repeated to me, and the note skilfully opened with a little steam, and then reclosed as soon as read, I decided upon delivering the missive in person, with one or two auxiliaries in case of difficulty arising in the execution of the task. Getting down to St Mary's Wynd, I easily found the stair in question, and having no doubt that Mr Pete would be found at home, when to appear abroad was fraught with danger, I ascended to the top flat, knocked at once at the proper door, and explained my business to the Irish woman who opened the door. Inside as I did so I could see a cropped head bent over the table at an acute angle, the owner being engaged in the—to him—rare and difficult task of critically examining the address on a strong white card, such as one might affix to a package of goods destined for rail or steamer. The face attached to the cropped head I did not recognise, because I had never before seen the features; but I had no doubt as to the man's identity when the woman instantly alluded to him as her lodger, and tendered him the note. Having stared rather scowlingly and searchingly at me, Pete opened the envelope, and then after scratching his head over it for some minutes, at last discovered that he could not read. The old woman being appealed to, quickly took the letter in her hand, and in about five minutes made a similar discovery. Then the note was handed to me, and I read its contents, on hearing which Mr Pete looked black as thunder, and audibly hoped that he might be a condemned sinner, and steeped in everlasting warmth, if he gave a penny towards such an object as the release of Snoddy.

While he was thus expressing himself, I had moved closer to the table at which he was seated, and saw that the card he had been examining as anxiously as he had afterwards scanned the note, bore the following inscription:—

"Mister pat flannagin
dealer in old clothes
Bellfast
ireland."

"Old close, to be kepp dry
and ly till caled for."

“Well, ye needn’t wait here any longer,” sharply observed Pete. “I’m not going to fork out, an’ I don’t suppose Jemmy—that’s a friend of mine—cares a cuss what comes of Snoddy. Howsoever, now that I think on it, I’ll run down an’ see Jemmy, and ask what he’s going to do. You can come wi’ me if you like—it’s no great distance—a broker’s close by.”

Now going to a broker’s was exactly what I wished to avoid, as the moment one of these gentry should catch sight of my face, I knew the whole scheme would explode. However, there was no getting out of it now, and I followed Mr Pete down the stair and street, merely signalling to my men—with a motion of the fingers behind my back—to get close in behind me.

At the broker’s Pete walked boldly into the back shop, and I followed, expecting to be recognised at every step; but on reaching the back I found only another owner of a cropped head, busy sewing up a bale of goods for transport, and the owner of the shop absent.

The cause of our visit being explained to the diligent Jemmy, he, with more energetic language than his friend, avowed that he hoped Snoddy would rot bones and body in prison; and then gleefully added—

“Tell you it’s the best thing that could have happened, for by the time his seven days is up, we’ll be——”

The remainder of the sentence was spoken in a whisper inaudible to me, but seemed to consist of something highly amusing, for over it the two chuckled and nudged each other till their sides must have been sore. In the midst of their glee the broker himself came bustling into the shop, bearing a jug in his hand frothing over with about half a gallon of freshly-drawn beer. He smiled in concert with the other two till his gaze fell upon me, when he instantly staggered back, paled to a sickly hue, and dropped the jug smash on the floor.

Pete and Jemmy started round in fury, and shook him roughly.

“What the d—l do you mean by that?” they exclaimed in a breath; but he continued only to stare at my face, and then managed to stammer out faintly—

“N—n—nothing.”

Just as he got the words out, however, M’Sweeny and the other two closed in on the open door of the back-shop, and the trapped thieves, starting back, scented danger for the first time.

“What’s up? what does it mean?” they cried, catching the broker’s dismay, and faintly sinking into seats.

"M-M-M'Govan!" faltered the broker. "You're done for!" The thieves collapsed abjectly, grinding their teeth, and with clenched hands vengefully breathing out the one word—"Snoddy!"

Then we handcuffed them together, and took them and the broker up to the Office, locking up the shop till we could send down a hurly for the valuable bale of "old close," which proved to be the entire rolls of cloth stolen four days before in Leith.

The bank notes we did not find, though we searched well for them, till I stumbled across the card which had been meant for the bale of cloth, when the idea struck me to inquire at the *Poste Restante* in Belfast, where, sure enough, we found the three £10 notes, addressed to "Mister pat flannigan, to lie till called for."

Pete and Jemmy did not meet Snoddy till they were placed together at the bar of the High Court, when the first-named gentleman instantly improved the shining hour by striking Snoddy a terrific blow on the temples, which effectually counted him out of that day's proceedings.

From that blow Snoddy never fairly recovered, though he was spared long enough to help to send his beloved pals to a well-deserved sentence of ten years' penal servitude. Should either of them be alive and read this account, what throes of anguish will rend their tender bosoms upon discovering that their suspicions were unkind, and their retaliation cruel and unjust!

A HARVEST MYSTERY.

ABOUT a mile south of Edinburgh there is a high point on the common road at which weary travellers get their first glimpse of the spires, castle, and thick-set house-tops of the city. The road at that point being secluded, girt by soft green banks, and sheltered from every rude wind by tall hedges, it is a spot at which hundreds upon hundreds have paused to view the city beneath, in peaceful joy or fierce discontent, as the case might be, before passing on their way to battle for an existence. Towards the point I have described, three footsore wanderers were approaching from the south one calm, clear evening in September, when the pale sunshine, striking in level rays across shorn fields, indicated that sunset was close at hand. The three travellers were ragged, and somewhat dirty, but bright, hopeful, and animated withal. There was a mother, Mrs O'Donnel; there was a curious bundle of rags, with towsy head and quick eyes, called Phelim, who was nearly ten, and son of Mrs O'Donnel; and there was a delicate slip of a girl of about six, called Aileen, sister of Phelim, and the special concern of both him and his mother.

Over Mrs O'Donnel's back were slung a reaping hook sheathed in straw, and a bundle tied tightly up in a coloured cotton handkerchief. Phelim had no reaping hook over his shoulder, being too small and young to use one, but he also had a bundle hung over his shoulder; and it is between these two bundles that lies the mystery of this sketch.

They were very tired with walking miles upon miles on stony roads, and now dragged on in Indian file in the order of their strength—the mother foremost, Phelim a little behind her, and Aileen some distance further back. As they began to ascend the last point before sighting Edinburgh, Phelim turned to see his sister limping painfully along; and in spite of having the bundle to carry, waited till she reached his side, lifted her in his arms, and manfully attempted to bear her up the slope.

A yard or two of the double toil was enough for him; for he breathlessly let her down with the words—

“Och, sure, it’s willin’ I am, Aileen, dear; but the stringth won’t let me.”

So they moved along, hand in hand, Phelim showing her how to keep on the soft, cool grass skirting the road, and so save her feet, already cut and bleeding. The mother already stood at the highest point, her rough figure standing out clear on a background of mild blue sky; and when Phelim reached her side and beheld the great city beneath, with its thousand windows and sharp spires flaring redly in the declining sun he suddenly clapped his hands in delight, and eagerly exclaimed—

“Oh, mother dear! is that Oirland?”

“No, darlin’, it’s only Edinburgh,” was the mother’s reply. “And the next town’s Glasgow, and then we come to Ireland. Sure, it would seem a long way, if your poor father wasn’t at the end of it, waiting to welcome us back wid a smile and a blessin’.”

“Yes, and he’ll be so proud to see we’ve saved so much, and not spent a farthin’ barring what we couldn’t help,” observed Phelim, with the air of an old man, as they seated themselves on the green bank in sight of the city, and he thrust his feet into the trickling stream by the road side. “Sure, isn’t it sweet to sit on the grass wid your feet in the cool wather? I could sit here all night, mother, and never weary. It’s the gettin’ up again that bothers me.”

“Then your father ’ud get small comfort out of us if we sat idling while he was in want,” reprovingly remarked the mother, as she produced a hunk of shearer’s bread, and gave each of the children a piece. “We’d have had other three days’ shearin’, but for that blackguard Owld Shaun. He bears us no goodwill, and would take the bit out of our mouths if he could, bad luck to him!”

“Yes, and he laughed at me because my trouser legs don’t both come to my ankles,” said Phelim, in hot resentment. “And then he said he thought we’d be going home on the shocharawn; so I fired up and said we might look like beggars, but we weren’t, and that mebbe we’re not so poor as people tuck us for.”

“Bad cess to him, he’ll sup sorrow for it yet,” remarked the mother, “and all because he couldn’t get the cabin tuck from your poor father and give to him.”

"Yet he gave me a ha'penny to run a message," said little Aileen, in grateful remembrance.

"Humph! if I'd been there you'd have flung it back in his face," hotly observed the boy. "What did he mane by saying we'd feathered our nest well, and hadn't kept in with the master for nothing? Faith, I was never happier than when we left him behind, and walked away along the road, every step bringin' us nearer Oirland!"

The mother said nothing, but took Aileen in her lap and chafed the bruised and cut feet in a tender way that made all pain and fatigue vanish as by magic. Phelim, with the irrepressible spirit still rampant, climbed the opposite bank to look through a hedge gap down on the lower and more modern road.

"There's another road down here, mother," he cried, in delighted surprise, "and it's smoother and nicer looking than this. Wouldn't we have been better to have taken that one?"

"No; this one's rough, but it's straighter and shorter. The easiest way isn't always the best," said the mother. "Thaving is easy, but who ever got rich by it?"

"There's a policeman going along to Edinburgh—the same that used to stop and see us working in the field," added Phelim, shading his eyes with his hand. "How the sun shines on his hat and belt, and what a tearin' hurry he's in, looking over every wall and gate as he goes. I wonder if he's lost anything? He's speaking to a man now, and the man shakes his head. He's off again, and how I'd like if I cou'd walk like that! Sure, I'd be in Oirland to-morrow."

The mother heard the remark, but was perhaps too busy with her own thoughts to particularly note the apparent simplicity of the allusion to the hurrying policeman, though she was to recall every syllable before long. While they were thus wearily approaching Edinburgh, and at length reaching the threepenny lodging in the Grassmarket called a "Home for Travellers," the county police constable whom Phelim had seen, was rapidly making his way to the Central Office, where he reported the theft of a watch by an Irish woman or her child, who had that day quitted the employment of the farmer robbed, with the intention of walking to Edinburgh. The theft had been so promptly detected and reported that the constable had fully expected to overtake the culprits on the road; but as they had shown more nimbleness than he had credited them with, he now required the help of a city officer to aid in their arrest, by showing him the likeliest lodging in

the Grassmarket in which to search for his quarry. That this part of the city was to be their resting-place appeared to have been gathered from a remark they had made before starting; and though I had little hope of finding them, and expected that the whole would be but a "herring trailed across the scent" to mislead, I readily accompanied the man to the Grassmarket. The first place visited produced no clue to the culprits; but the second, which was crowded to the door by a noisy collection of shearers of every age and appearance, was more fruitful. When we entered the room there were at least fifty weary travellers grouped around, some seated on forms, others squatted on the bare floor, all busy talking, protesting, shouting, or eating, generally at hard bread, cheese, or bacon, the more difficult to digest the more profitable to the poor hard-working eaters; but the moment the hat of the county constable appeared within the doorway, a dead silence fell on all. The proprietor of the establishment, fearful of fines for over-crowding, was stepping forward to volubly explain that not one-half of those present were to sleep in the place that night, when I raised a hand sharply, and motioned to the constable to speak.

"Is there one Mrs O'Donnel here, with her boy Phelim and and her girl Aileen?" he demanded, in a voice startling enough in its official-like sternness to make every one present glance fearfully and suspiciously at his neighbour.

"Yes, sur, I'm here, and my children with me," came at once from the other end of the room; and Mrs O'Donnel moved forward somewhat excitedly, saying, "Is there anything wrong that we're axed for?"

There was a deep stillness in the long room, as the three moved forward, and stood alone in the long circle of wondering faces with the keen eye of the constable running quickly over their countenances in search of a guilty flush or cowering look.

"That is what we're here to try to find out. You left the Hillside Farm to-day, didn't you?"

"Yes, sur."

"What did you take away with you?"

"Not a rag—not a ha'porth but what was our own," vehemently answered the mother, evidently becoming more uneasy. "What should we take, I'd like to know? We're not thaves, else you wouldn't see our feet cut and sore wid rough roads."

The reasoning, like most advanced by her sex, was some-

what defective, and the stolid constable had no time to waste on the niceties of language.

"Where's your bundles? Turn them out, if you don't want to go with me," he said, with business-like promptitude, being evidently accustomed to deal with her class after a fixed idea of his own. "You've nothing to hide, I suppose; and as there is information against you, p'raps it's the best plan you could follow, though it's not in our power to force you to it here."

"May the curse of heaven light on me and my children, if you find that we've tuck anything that's not our own," fervently returned Mrs O'Donnel, as she produced her unopened bundle and placed it in the hands of the constable. "There's my bundle; open it before all these good paiple, and if I lie you may punish me for it."

The bundle was opened, and every separate article carefully examined, but nothing found which might not be picked up for nothing any morning from our city dust-heaps.

"Is that all you've got?" asked the constable, after whispering to me, expressing a suspicion that they had rid themselves of the plunder on entering the city.

"All, but the money we've earned by slavin' night an' day since we kem over," cried the mother, beginning to breathe again, "except Phelim's bundle, wid the stockings and shirts."

"Where's Phelim's bundle?" asked the constable.

"Here, sur;" and Phelim turned right round as he spoke, and showed it yet fastened on his back. "Sure, I forgot it was there till this minit, though I might have felt the weight of it after carryin' it so far."

"And ye may save yourself the bother of opening it, for I put it up myself, and was particular that nothing went in it that worn't our own," observed the mother, as the bundle was untied from the boy's shoulder and opened before her eyes.

"Nothing but shirts and stockings, you said?" inquiringly returned the constable. "What do you call this?" and he held up a large horn-handled pocket-knife, with one large blade, and a hole through the handle for a string. "Is this yours?"

Both mother and boy stared at the knife in mute surprise, and at length the face of the former flushed stern and severe as she turned on the boy for an explanation.

"No, that's not ours, unless Phelim got it from any one, or found it."

"Imphm, where the Hielantman found the tongs—at the fireside," drily remarked the constable.

"Speak up, Phelim!" cried the mother, in anguish, to the speechless and staring boy. "Did you find the knife and put it in the bundle?"

"No, mother; I never saw it till this minute, or knew it was in the bundle," simply and earnestly answered the boy; and something in his face made me incline to believe that he spoke the truth, till another exultant cry from my companion sent my wits a-floundering.

"And you never saw this either, I suppose?" he added, turning out a coarse worsted stocking, and producing from the inside a silver verge watch, with old-fashioned double cases, worth at most ten shillings, and holding it up before their eyes. "This is what I've come so far to find. The knife I heard nothing of, though we may get an owner for it too, before we have done with you."

A wail of grief burst from the poor mother, and, pale as death, and with hands clasped in anguish, she turned and fixed one long look of reproach on the tearful countenance of the boy. Not a word was spoken—nothing but the mute, death-like look of horror and dismay; but the glance spoke to the boy as no words could have done, and with a shuddering cry he dropped on his knees on the floor, and tried to clasp his mother round the knees.

"Mother, mother!" he screamed, "don't look at me like that! It cuts my heart out. I never saw the watch, nor touched it, nor knew it was there. Heaven strike me dead before you if I don't spake the truth!" and as the piteous words rang forth, there was a gruff and sympathetic murmuring from all sides of "Amen to that!"

"Then say you found it; say you found it!" cried the distracted mother, now turned accuser. "Sure, it couldn't walk into your bundle itself, and the bundles were never out of our hands from the minute I tied them up wid me own hands. Don't make us all thaves alike."

"I didn't take them, nor see them," protested the boy, after a dead pause to gaze wistfully into his mother's face. "Sure, mother, I can't tell a lie."

Nothing more could be made of any of them, so we marched them off to the Central Office, where, after emitting a similar declaration, they were locked up till we could get witnesses. A day or two's investigation proved that the pocket-knife had been taken from one of the shearers in some mysterious way, and that another of the shearers, named John Reilly, but better

known as Black Shaun, had heard Phelim say that they—meaning his mother, sister, and himself—did not mean to leave the farm empty-handed, and that before leaving he had seen them stow something like a watch away in one of the bundles. Having brought in these two witnesses, as well as the farmer robbed, we had the case brought up at the Court for trial. All three prisoners were placed at the bar, and charged conjointly with the theft, and as they as strenuously as ever asserted their innocence, the case went to proof.

Black Shaun had a deal to say that made matters look very black for the prisoners, nor was his evidence to be easily overturned; for when any puzzling question was put to him, he took refuge in a stupid grin, and the words, "Sure, I don't know anything about that, an' I wouldn't wish them harm for all the world."

Questioned more closely as to which of the prisoners he had seen put the watch into the bundle, his evidence became hazr and indefinite.

"Faith, that's more than I could tell; for they wor all soi o' mixed up, and I didn't think at the time o' them staling, and I was hurrying past; but I'm sure I saw the shining white thing amongst them."

"It's a black-hearted liar he is, savin' your honour's presence," cried Mrs O'Donnel. "He has a reason for wishing us ill, as he wants the bit cabin at home, that keeps me poor sick husband from the cowl and rain. And I'll prove it, yer honour. He tried to throw the blame on poor Phelim, when the truth is that Phelim wasn't near me when I put up the bundles, and they wor that tight tied that no one could have slipped the things in after; more by token, they never were out of our hands."

"You have narrowed the question considerably by this statement," sharply observed the Sheriff, who sat on the bench, after a moment's thought. "You state that you alone tied up the bundles; that they were so tightly tied up that the things could not have been slipped in by an outsider; and lastly, which is most important, that the bundles from that moment were never out of your joint possession. Yet, according to the evidence already given, the articles stolen were found not only inside the bundles, but tightly wedged into the centre of a pair of stockings. Under these circumstances, I think we do not need to look far for the criminal. We find you alone guilty of the theft. The children can be taken to the poor-house, or sent

home to their father; but in the meantime you must suffer imprisonment for——”

A great cry interrupted the Sheriff, and looking round we saw Phelim, pale as death, but with a fearful eagerness shining out of his eyes, motioning to the Court to allow him to be heard.

“Oh, sur, would you let me spake a word!” he exclaimed. “Don’t send my mother and the girleen to jail, as they’re innocent and know nothing about it. I confess it all. I tuck the watch, somehow, and slipped it into the bundle unknownst to them, thinking—yes—that it ’ud bring a lot of money to take home wid us to me father. I didn’t know what I was doing at the time,” he incoherently pursued, with a bright red spot on either of his cheeks that a moment before had been white as snow; “but I want to be punished and sent to jail for a dreadful long time, if you’ll only send them away home to my father wid the money they’ve earned. My father! my father!” he suddenly wailed out, stopping short and bursting into tears, “oh, what will my father say when he hears I’m a thafe!”

His exclamation was echoed by a pitiable groan from the poor mother, who was so overpowered that she had to be allowed to sit down. The child Aileen also burst out crying, and the scene became so distressing that the Sheriff, anxious evidently to get it over, simply said—

“Humph! he has begun young. Seven days. Remove the prisoner and call the next case.”

But to remove the prisoner was precisely where the difficulty came in. It is true that his mother made no opposition, but sat there as still as if she had just been shot through the heart; but the child Aileen threw herself into Phelim’s arms, and loudly declared that she wanted to go to prison too. Then, as he got himself out of her twining arms, he timidly touched his mother’s motionless figure with his hand to remind her that he was going, and at the same time bent down and quickly whispered—

“Sure, mother, keep up your heart, for I only said it to get you off, and let you go back to my father, who’d die if you were sent to prison or transported. I won’t be missed so much as the strong bread-winner, and mebbe I’ll be forgiven for the lie, and sure I can see that Black Shaun wants us all in prison, and it’ll be a vartue to cheat him out of it.”

The eyes of the boy, shining as they were with tears, looked so truthful and beaming that the mother’s apathy and despair

vanished more quickly than they had overpowered her; and springing to her feet she joyfully cried to the Sheriff—

“Oh, sur, stop a moment, and don’t take the innocent gossoon to prison. He says he only said it to get me and the girleen off and back to his father; but I can’t let him do that, and ruin himself for life. Oh, sur, if you’ve a heart, think of the characters he’ll meet with in a jail, who’ll try to make him as bad as themselves, and let him off though you take me in his place. Troth, it’s a light heart I’ll suffer with, now that I know he didn’t do it.”

To this appeal, with all its native eloquence and thrilling power, the Sheriff could make no reply, but a motion of the head directing them to remove the convicted prisoner. The loud outcry and voluble protests of the mother were made in vain, and she herself was speedily expelled the court-room for interrupting the business of the morning. But this poor wretched woman was not to be so easily repressed. The honest Catholic, no matter what part of the globe he or she may be cast upon, has a friend that is always accessible, and a friend that has often power to right a wrong of the foulest description—I mean the Catholic priest. To one of these Mrs O’Donnel carried her griefs and her story, and so powerfully did she move him that he exerted himself to the utmost in trying to obtain the release of the boy, and also to establish his innocence. He failed, of course; for a prisoner, once convicted on his own pleading of guilt, cannot, however innocent, be looked upon as such by the law; but the good he attempted to do followed after Phelim’s short sentence had expired. Mrs O’Donnel had not gone back to Ireland, but by the priest’s advice sent enough to bring her sick husband to Scotland, while with twenty shillings sent her by a lady through the priest, she opened a little hovel in the Cowgate as a broker’s shop. As for Phelim, he showed such intelligence, brightness, and unquenchable affection for his parents, that he was sent to a school, instead of being allowed to run wild; and at this school, as he did not, like the majority in Catholic schools, spend the time in romping, shouting, and singing, he first became a monitor, and then one of the teachers. When he was grown quite a lad, the same friends, finding their assistance well bestowed, combined their efforts, and had him sent to All Hallow’s College, near Dublin, to take orders as a priest. Phelim was now a tall, handsome fellow, whom, but for a certain softness of eye when speaking of his parents, no one

would have taken for the ragged urchin convicted on his own confession, and sent to prison before my eyes, some ten years before.

Just five years after he had taken orders, I met him in Glasgow, though he had to introduce himself to me and explain where we had first met; and at that interview he related to me the following incident, which shall form the conclusion of my imperfect sketch:—

During a bad epidemic of typhus fever in one of the most crowded districts of that city, a man—an Irish labourer—was taken ill with the fever in its most virulent form. The place in which he lodged was a mere garret, belonging to a couple as poor as himself; but so great was their consternation and dread of the trouble, that they at once abandoned all their effects, and left the house and patient to their fate. He had lain thus unattended—sometimes sensible and at others delirious, for two days, when an Irish beggar chancing to knock at the door discovered him, and was at once assailed with the imploring cry—

“I’m dying! I’m dying! For the love of God, sind for a praist! I can’t get rest to my sowl till I see a praist.”

The beggar, glad doubtless to fly the spot, did not linger on the way, but went straight to the home of Phelim O’Donnel, and stated what he had discovered. Phelim was just lying down, thoroughly exhausted, having been up all night at cases quite as urgent; but the moment the facts were stated, he sprang up, donned his clothes, and ran every inch of the way to the abode of the dying man. A crowd, awed and silent, hung about the foot of the wooden stair, listening to the groans and shrieks coming from above; but these uncovered reverently as Phelim passed up to the chamber of death, saying joyfully, “Here’s the praist! Blessed be God, here’s the praist at last, to say the kind word to the poor sowl before he goes.”

Phelim O’Donnel passed into the wretched room, and the moment he did so the dying man feebly clasped his hand, and fixing his eyes upon the visitor, eagerly cried—

“Oh, sir, I was afeared—I was afeared you wouldn’t come. Sure I can’t get rest to me sowl thinking of a poor wee bouchal I wanst ruined and sent to jail by false swearing. We were harvesting together, and his mother an’ me had an owld grudge, and so I gave the innocent girleen a ha’penny to run a fool’s errand, while I slipped a stolen watch into one of the bundles she was watching. Sure, I’ve seen the boy’s face afore me ever

since in my dreams, and he's always pushing me—pushing me into eternal flames for making him a criminal and sending him the bad road!”

The young priest started up with a joyful cry, removed his hat, and placing his face directly before the dying man, exclaimed—

“Black Shaun—John Reilly, look into my face, and bless God that His ways are not our ways! I am Phelim O'Donnel; and your sin, far from sending me the bad road, was a blessing from heaven, that has made me a priest of God, with all the world before me to do good in and bless His holy name!”

Black Shaun gazed incredulously into the bright face for a moment or two, and then sank back with a deep sigh of thankfulness, which speedily was followed by tears of contrition and a faint prayer for forgiveness. The scenes which followed—the hurried breathing forth of the sins of a lifetime, with the holy rites peculiar to their Church—must remain veiled from the reader as they were from me; but when Phelim O'Donnel descended to the awed group below, his face was radiant and peaceful, and in answer to the eager inquiries, he said—

“Yes, he died happy—very happy. God give us all as peaceful an end!”

And then his hearers—as I and perhaps my readers now do—with one breath cried “Amen!”

THE SQUARE-TOED BLUCHERS.

THERE is not much of a clue, some will say, in a pair of coarse boots, and perhaps there isn't, but we are only too glad at times of any clue, however trifling. A mere twinkling of the eye, as if in triumph, a stammer, or a strong denial, a little too brazen-faced, have often to do duty in the same way. And, after all, a man may be as readily known by his boots as anything he wears; for, after finding out by experience the kind of boots which suit his work and his feet, he does not change much according to the whim of fashion, as he may do in the cut of his coat or trousers.

The first I heard of the bluchers was from a minister's manse at the South Side. The dark nights had come, and the family were out at a party, excepting the minister himself and the servant. The minister, whom I may call Dunlop, ought to have been out too; but it chanced to be Friday night, and he was still busy with the sermon for the coming Sunday, and so he had to remain hard at work in his study, while his wife and daughters enjoyed themselves abroad. The study window looked out at the end of the house, which was at that part closely skirted by a wall with a flat copestone. The front of the garden was protected by an iron railing, the last bar of which could just be seen, and no more, from the study window by any one pressing their face close to the pane. The wall itself was a very high one, but in running round the house passed within a yard of the window of the servant's room, which was built at the back of the house, and immediately above the kitchen.

While Mr Dunlop was deep in his sermon, and quite sure of not being disturbed, as his careful wife had locked the front gate on leaving, it struck him dimly that some one was tugging or rattling at the iron railing guarding the front garden. He did not rise immediately, but finished the sentence he was writing, without thinking particularly of the sound; then with the first break in his thoughts came the recollection of the

rattling, and he walked to the window and peered down through the venetian blinds in the direction of the wall and the railing. No one was visible, but, still unsatisfied, he went inside the blind, raised the window, and looked out. The wall passed his window so close that he could have touched it with the end of his umbrella, and at the beginning of this wall—that is, where the iron railing ceased—he plainly saw two dark objects resting on the flat copestone.

“They can’t be cats,” was his quick thought, “because no one ever saw two cats sit side by side in the open air without growling or fighting. What can they be?”

Neither the light nor the minister’s eyesight was good, so he left the study and softly entered a room with a window directly opposite the queer, dark objects. By opening this window and using a pair of tongs, Mr Dunlop very soon discovered that the objects were a pair of strong, square-toed blucher boots. On taking them into the study with him, the minister found that they were still warm inside, as if a pair of feet had been not many moments out of them, and as the toes had been pointing towards the back of the house, Mr Dunlop’s prompt suspicion was that the owner had clambered up on to the wall by means of the iron railing, and then, seeing the light in the study window, and fearing to make a noise in passing, he had quietly slipped off the boots, and thus crossed the rubicon in safety. Mr Dunlop was both lenient and good-humoured, and would probably have winked at a servant having a sweetheart or follower, but this way of entering the house could not be tolerated. Indeed, for aught he knew, the owner of the boots might be no follower, but a housebreaker; so shutting up the boots in his study, Mr Dunlop went straight to the kitchen—at least he meant to go there, but was pulled up by hearing whispered words in the servant’s room on the landing above. A sharp rap on the door elicited a sudden scream from within, and, throwing open the door, the minister was just in time to see a figure vanish with extraordinary speed through the window and on to the top of the wall. Of course, Marion M’Queen, the servant, immediately fell into tears, and went down on her knees, protesting that it was entirely against her orders that the man had come to see her, and made his way in in such a strange fashion. Her master was really more amused than angry, but he nevertheless read her a severe lecture, and finally promised not to speak about it to her mistress, upon Marion promising never again to offend in the same way.

A little to his surprise, however, this leniency on his part did not console her or stop her tears. The girl appeared more distressed than ever at the mention of her mistress; and at length Mr Dunlop, remembering his queer fishing with the tongs from the window, said—

“Oh, I suppose it’s your sweetheart’s boots you’re distressed about? Well, you can tell him he’ll get his boots if he comes to me for them himself.”

For a moment the girl looked stupidly at him, and then he found that she knew nothing of the boots, and had not even noticed that her lover had left them outside. Clearly, then, this could not be the cause of her distress; but what that was Mr Dunlop had no chance of discovering till next day, when his wife startled him by saying that one of her finger rings had been stolen. The gem was not a very valuable one, but it had been her engagement ring, and the minister’s wife declared that she not only valued it above all she possessed, but took such care of it that it could not possibly have gone amissing by accident, or without thievish fingers. The servant of course was questioned, but she firmly declared that she knew nothing of it. The minister looked grave, and thought of the square-toed bluchers lying unclaimed in his study; and after a vain attempt to laugh the loss over, at last consented that the police should be called in. I was sent out, and from the manner of the servant and her master, I was inclined to believe that they both knew something of the ring. Mr Dunlop still kept his pledge to the girl by saying nothing of the bluchers or their owner to me, and I went away not much the wiser of their evidence. A day or two after, however, I was in a pawnshop out near Fountainbridge, looking over a number of pledges in search of a scarf pin, when I came upon a gold ring, set with pearls and rubies, which had been only a day in the place.

There are so many rings of this pattern made that I did not expect anything from that, till I noticed that one of the smaller stones was gone. The stolen ring was thus described, and with more interest I asked who had pawned it. The man could only remember that it was a woman, and not a very old one, but, on referring to the books, I was petrified to find the name “Marion M’Queen.”

The address was a false one, it is true, but there was the name staring me in the face in black and white. Still I would not be rash; and, taking the ring with me, I went out to the mause, and showed it to Mrs Dunlop, who identified it beyond

all doubt as her lost ring. Now, here was a grave position for the girl, and I would have arrested her upon the spot but for the minister's interposition. He now told me the adventure of the boots, placed the square-toed bluchers in my hand, and firmly gave it as his opinion that the owner of the boots, and not poor Marion, would be found to be the thief of the ring, and ended with the modest request that I should first have a hunt for the man. I could not quite see things in that light, and went down to the kitchen and scared all the blood from Marion's face by saying sternly—

"I find, after all, Marion, that I'll have to take you to prison for stealing that ring which you pawned out near the Fountain-bridge."

She dropped the dish in her hand, and it was smashed unheeded on the floor, and then burst into tears with the exclamation—

"I never pawned it, and I never stole it, but it was ta'en off my finger by force."

"By whom?"

A dead silence, except in sobbing.

"Was it your sweetheart?—the man who left his boots with Mr Dunlop?"

"Yes. I put on the mistress's brooch and the ring, thinking no harm, and meaning to put them back before she came in; but Bauldie saw the ring whenever he came in, and fought till he got it off my finger and on his ain. Then the minister came in before I got it back, and he gaed away sae quick that I hadna time to ask it."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"What does he do?"

"I think he's a flesher."

This was all she did know, and it was not quite enough, for, as it turned out, Bauldie was not a flesher, but only a porter engaged in carrying meat from the slaughter-house. Still, in the belief that he was a flesher, I went out to the slaughter-house with the square-toed bluchers wrapped in paper under my arm, as soon as I had seen Marion safely under lock and key. I did not trouble to ask for any one of that name, as I mistakenly believed that it was a fictitious one; but I did, in the absence of any description of his face or form, look very keenly at every pair of feet in and about the place. I was two hours out at the place, and had made absolutely no progress, when I

noticed a group of porters near the entrance, smoking and joking in a rough fashion. I did not join the group, but from a little distance scanned their feet and boots most eagerly. There was but one tolerably young man among them, and he wore bluchers, which, so far as I could judge, were not unlike the pair I carried. It was a mere venture on my part, but I resolved to tackle the owner of the bluchers, and approached the group. As I did so, one of them recognised me and said—

“Eh, Bauldie, there’s M’Govan, the fief-catcher;” adding some query to me regarding the parcel under my arm, which he pretended to believe I was stealing.

The man addressed as Bauldie was moving off very quietly, when I stopped him with the words—

“Wait a moment; I want to show you a bargain—a pair of boots I want to get rid of cheap.”

A hoarse laugh greeted the speech, and I unrolled the square-toed bluchers, and shoved one of them into the not very willing grasp of Bauldie, whose face was a curious study. He was half-frightened and half-doubtful as to whether I had any suspicion of him, though his face, as his eye became riveted to the boot, became very much less bloated and red.

“Hoo much are ye wanting for the buits?” he asked at length, with a manifest effort.

“That’s the curious thing,” I laughingly answered. “I don’t want anything for them. If they fit you, you’re welcome to them. Try them on.”

Every one laughed louder; but Bauldie could not see the joke, and instead of obeying me and taking the urgent advice of his companions, he tossed down the boot and turned to leave, saying it was time he was going.

“Stop!” I said, more sternly, and riveting my hand on his arm; “you must try on these boots, or try on my hand-cuffs! Come, now; which will you have?”

He chose the boots, and, amid much chaffing, put them on, when they appeared to fit perfectly. I fastened the laces and picked up the old ones he had thrown off, saying coolly—

“They appear to fit you so well that you may as well keep them on till you walk to the Office with me.”

He obeyed without a word, much to the surprise of his companions, and I thought I had got to the end of the case; more especially when Marion promptly identified him as her lover and the thief of the ring. But all the way to the Office Bauldie had remained silent and thoughtful. He had been occupied,

no doubt, in a careful calculation as to how far he was really involved, and looked almost cheerful when he was identified. Then, when the charge was explained to him, he gave us the result of his cogitations.

"I never saw the buits afore," he said, in allusion to the square-toed bluchers with which I had fitted him, "and they're nae mair mine than they're Maister M'Govan's. I've seen the lassie afore, I admit, but I wasna in her hoose last Friday nicht, and I never took a ring off her finger nor saw her wearing ane. I ken naething aboot the ring, and can prove that I was twa mile away at the time."

To this statement, in spite of every appeal from the poor servant girl, he adhered most tenaciously, and even got some boon companions with whom he had been drinking on the Friday—most probably after losing his boots—to come forward and prove an *alibi*. What helped him, no doubt, was the fact that the minister had been so absorbed in his studies that he had but a vague idea of the hour at which the boots came into his hands and the owner took flight; and as Bauldie had in all probability got a young woman to pawn the ring, and give with it the name of Marion M'Queen, it is not surprising that the pawnbroker's assistant, when shown the tearful prisoner, said he thought it was she. On the whole, the case went strongly against Marion, and her very admissions to me, truthful though they doubtless were, helped to rivet the guilt upon her. She was convicted of stealing the ring, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment, while the charge against Bauldie was found "not proven," and he was discharged. As Bauldie persisted in refusing the square-toed bluchers, and the minister had no use for them, they remained with us; and more than once, as I came upon them in turning over the strange collection of rubbish which steadily accumulates in our hands, I thought of poor Marion suffering, as I believed, innocently in prison, while her selfish betrayer stalked about in impunity, and I longed heartily for a chance to pay him back for that, and for the clean slip he had made through my fingers. He was a coarse, brutal fellow, and one was puzzled to think what a smart lassie like Marion could have seen in him to admire; but women have their own taste in these matters.

As yet, however, as the reader has seen, Bauldie was not one of my "bairns," or a recognised criminal. He was merely one of the buzzing moths I have so often spoken of circling the flame, and longing to get at the beautiful star before them; but

he had been successful, and there lay my hope. I felt sure I should hear of him again.

Some time after the ring affair, a house at Newington was coolly entered one night while the family were asleep, by the dining-room window being lifted from without. It is possible that a haul might have been made, but the master of the house chanced to be wakeful that night, and hearing what he thought was a cat wandering about below, he got up, thinking some of the windows had been left open, and intending to chase the brute out again. With only his slippers and a dressing-gown on, he went downstairs crying "Shoo! shoo!" as he went, and the cat, a tall, buirdly man, at once took flight, and vanished through the dining-room window to the open air. So softly had the man run, that he was gone almost before the gentleman had realised the situation, and then he was quite sure that the man was on his stocking soles, a suspicion which I readily confirmed next morning on examining the ground in front of the house. There had been two engaged in the affair, but one only, so far as I could guess, had gone inside; and from some deep footprints immediately before the dining-room window, I was of opinion that he had there removed his boots and left them, while his companion had watched at the garden gate to give warning of the approach of any policeman.

In leaving the house and garden he had only had time to lift his boots and run, and so had left the imprint of his big stockinged feet on the soft mould nearly all the way to the gate. He did not like the knubbly gravel of the walk, I suppose, and so left his marks for my guidance.

Now, though every housebreaker at work moves through the house noiseless as a cat, it is not usual for him to leave his boots outside. This seemed to me to mark the novice, and having had Bauldie so recently through my fingers, I thought of him, and carried the square-toed bluchers out to the house to fit them to the marks. They matched very well in size and shape, and my next task was to fish out Bauldie's address. He had not been much about the slaughter-house of late, but at length I found a lad who knew the place, but not the number, and got him to conduct me to a house in Lady Lawson's Wynd. Here he pointed out a window on the slates, which he said was that of the room in which Bauldie and his mother lived.

I saw the window, and in front of it hanging from a string a pair of coarse worsted socks.

"Oho!" was my mental exclamation. "I am too late, then, and he has had his socks washed?"

Up I went and tackled the mother, for Bauldie, of course, was out. I have no doubt she guessed my occupation at a glance, for she instantly became wary in her words. She had been washing—ou ay; and she had nae particular time for washing—sometimes one day and sometimes another. No, it wasn't uncommon for her to wash only one pair of socks at a time; she had not many more to wash; and so on. More than that, Bauldie had been home only the night before, and had slept like a top the whole night through. I had expected that, too. The woman's trembling eagerness; her hungry watching of my face as I listened; and her whole demeanour, told me the old, old story of a mother willing to lie, sin, steal, suffer, or die for her offspring. I wanted to see Bauldie's boots, but he had only one pair, and they were out with him; so I soon left the house. At the foot of the wynd I met him full in the face, and he was about to dive past when I stopped him.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Bauldie?" I began. "Not been after any mischief, eh?"

I did not expect him to say he had, and was not disappointed.

"Sit down on that step a minute, and off with your boots," I continued, with a less playful look. "I've been up to the house and seen your socks—*newly washed*, curiously enough, though it's near the end of the week. 'They that wash on Saturday, oh, they are sluts indeed'—you know the old rhyme."

He squatted down and whipped off his boots—which, as I had expected, were square-toed bluchers; but he did it too promptly and confidently to please me. I picked up the first he threw off and looked inside, and then understood his confident smile. The boots had been rinsed out with water, too, before being put on, and were as free of earthy or muddy traces as the clean-washed socks I had taken from the window line.

I was done, and he knew it; but nevertheless I gravely told him to put on his boots and come with me. We kept him for a day or two on suspicion, while I tried to trace his companion, but at last he was let off. As he was leaving, I said to him—

"The third time's lucky, Bauldie; put it off as long as you can, for I'm afraid I'll nip you."

"Will you? You'll be clever, then," was his defiant remark, given with some words which need not be translated, and so we parted. To have begun preaching to him, or attempting to

advise him against the life he was entering upon, would have been throwing pearls before a very thick-headed swine indeed.

So the square-toed bluchers went back to limbo again, and I thought I had got all out of them I was likely to get, and that, after being twice nearly nipped, Bauldie would be careful ever after. But it is possible that the clue I had worked upon in both cases had not struck Bauldie himself nearly so forcibly as it had done me—at all events, I was soon hauling out the boots for comparison, and that in connection with a case more serious than any he had tried.

A house at a lonely part of Stockbridge, which was empty of its owners at the time, had been broken into one Sunday, and a great quantity of valuables carried off. The house was what is called semi-detached, and I suppose the fear of being heard in the next house had caused at least one of the thieves to remove his boots while at work. The men seemed to have spent the whole day in the place, and yet to have been scared in some way before leaving the building at night, for one bundle of things was left near an open window, and close by the bundle—what could be more suggestive?—a pair of square-toed blucher boots! When I saw the bluchers I thought of Bauldie; and when I found them the exact size and shape of those already in our possession, down to the very bulge of his big toe joint, I could scarcely believe my good fortune. If he had been able to write, and had chalked down “Bauldie” in capitals beside the bundle, I could not have been more agreeably surprised. I went out very smartly to Lady Lawson’s Wynd, but I found that his mother had given up the room and gone into the Poor-house, and the son now lived nobody knew where. I had seen him more than once in company with a thief named Coskey, and I knew Coskey’s den, so thither I went, and found Coskey, who put on his clothes and came with me without a word. While I was taking Coskey to the Office, fastened by one hand to my wrist, I thought I heard something rattle on the street behind us, and, suspecting he had thrown something away, stopped and found only a little brass padlock, such as you may buy for 6d. in any iron-monger’s. I could not understand his anxiety to get rid of such a thing, but when it was identified as having been wrenched from a tin cash-box in the house at Stockbridge, I quite appreciated his unsuccessful attempt.

I had no trace whatever of the plunder as yet, and Bauldie was invisible. At last I reasoned that he would likely have a

lodging in the quarter most familiar to him, and least likely to be searched by me—namely, the vicinity of Lady Lawson's Wynd. I went slowly over every boot-shop in the West Port, and at length discovered one which had sent out a "sight," as they called it, of men's boots—still the fatal square-toed bluchers. I was very speedily conducted to the house, which was close by; but Bauldie had heard my voice, and gone out by the window, and escaped through a tanner's yard in the direction of the Castle Road—boots and all this time. I let him go in the meantime, and turned my attention to the room he had so suddenly vacated. It was summer time, and there was, instead of a fire in the grate, a flimsy ornament of tissue paper. On this there were traces of soot droppings. I pulled it down ruthlessly, and thrusting up my arm as far as I could reach, just touched and no more a bundle wedged into the chimney. A hooked stick brought down the bundle, which turned out to be a number of plated articles taken from the house at Stockbridge, and which had not found a ready market with the fence whose melting-pot had swallowed the rest of the plunder. I was now doubly anxious to get hold of Bauldie, but I did not hunt much for him all day. I had studied the *style* of his actions, and found that there was not much variety or power of invention displayed in them. I had no doubt that after the first tearing rush away from my clutches, he would get quietly out of town, and there his race would end. His safety lay in getting as far from Edinburgh as possible, but I did not expect him to understand that. His greatest danger, some would have thought, lay in being near his old home, yet there I had surprised him. What more likely, then, that at nightfall he would creep back again, and get into hiding in some place unlikely to be searched by me? I had already collared Coskey, and of this capture Bauldie had no doubt been swiftly apprised; it was scarcely likely that I would go back to Coskey's den; what could be better, then, than to "lay up in lavender" at that lodging? Thus I fancied Bauldie would reason, and though I did look for him about the city, it was with little expectation of meeting him, and with a certain plan slowly maturing in my mind all the time. Coskey's lodging was a garret in a close in the Grassmarket, with a window jutting out on the roof. This part of the roof could be seen from the top of the close, and at that spot I planted M'Sweeny, with orders to keep moving, and not attract notice. As for me, I got up on the roof of the next house as

soon as it was dark, and crept along till I was close to the window of Coskey's "kitchen." There was a good deal of noisy talk inside, as the house was rather "promiscuous," but about twelve o'clock the long-awaited-for sound reached my ears—Bauldie's familiar tones asking for supper and a safe sleeping place. There was a noisy jingle after the demand, as if he had tossed down a sovereign, to show that he was able to pay for all he needed; and then I got out a lucifer match, and struck it as a signal to M'Sweeny to come up and guard the door. The answering twinkle of light came promptly, and then, after giving him time to get down the close, and up the stair, I crept down to the window, suddenly banged it up, and jumped in on the jaded man, amid a perfect howl of astonishment from all in the kitchen.

"M'Govan, the devil!" was the cruel and ungrateful remark of Bauldie as I throttled him; and then, as some one officiously ran and opened the door, the desire for liberty got the better of his prudence, and he fought like a demon. What a power was in his big body! I was like a child in his grasp, and though I called on all present in the Queen's name to help me, I might as well have called to the wind. At last he collected all his strength, and hurled me backwards on the floor, making a dash at the same time towards the open door. At the same moment, however, and while the fierce shout of triumph was ringing from Bauldie's lips, M'Sweeny's red hair and outstretched arms appeared in the doorway, and he was gripped and hugged with the strength of a polar bear. M'Sweeny, indeed, squeezed him till he was nearly breathless, and then slipped a whip-cord handcuff on his wrist before he had recovered enough to emit a howl of rage. It was the neatest thing I ever saw M'Sweeny do; and as he made a great bluster and noise, the others immediately changed their tactics and officiously helped me to rise.

"The third time's lucky, Bauldie," I breathlessly remarked, as we led him off.

"How the d—! did you spot me?" he savagely exclaimed.

I was nearly letting it out in the exultation of the moment, but then I drew back and said—

"Never mind now—that's a secret. I'll keep it to myself, in case I should need you again."

Coskey went back to the Penitentiary, and Bauldie went with him for a seven years' sentence, without once suspecting that he owed it all to his Square-toed Bluchers.

LITTLE LIZ'S LOCKET.

LINDSAY, the broker, was a strange man; silent as the grave, and curt almost to rudeness in his answers to us when duty took us to his dingy shop in the Cowgate, to leave a list of stolen articles or make other inquiries. His iron grey hair and seamed face, with a certain broken look in his figure, made me set down his age at some years above sixty; but I am certain now that the estimate was ten years at least above the reality. At first I liked his appearance and manners so little that I made pretty close inquiries into his antecedents, not quite sure that he was worthy to receive the broker's licence which he held. Strict as the authorities are, it often happens that a black sheep gets smuggled into the line, and then, with such a one at hand as a fence, petty thieving goes up at a bound. But my suspicions, I found, were not only groundless but unjust. Lindsay was an old soldier, respectable, rigidly honest, and holding the highest testimonials as to his worth. How, then, did such a man come to adopt the slow, retired life he led? His pension, it is true, was scarcely sufficient to support him, but the profits of his broking business seemed to me poor and dribbling to what he might have earned in some more active employment. Then he never left his shop to walk out for a breath of purer air except when his business forced him to it. He lived alone in the back part of the shop he rented, and no woman ever entered his home. I had been in the back room once, getting a candle lighted to look at some things behind his counter which he had just bought, and found the place neat and clean as if the smartest housewife had just flitted out as we entered. At times, I was told, Lindsay had been seen walking on the streets at dead of night, slowly and thoughtfully, with his head bent upon his breast, and an occasional muttered word rising to his lips; but he never looked at any one, or spoke, unless challenged by any of our night force. He seemed, indeed, to have no interest in the world or a single human being.

How I came to learn his story—or rather how it was forced

from him into my ear—was as singular as the history itself; but in giving the circumstances I will begin at the beginning, and let that incident appear in its proper place.

A slight swing in Lindsay's accent had given me the idea that he belonged to Glasgow, but I found that he came from a village near Mauchline—a pretty place embowered among woods and rocks on the banks of the river Ayr. In this sequestered spot, when but a boy, Lindsay chose for his companion a wild, harum-scarum lad like himself, called Peter Gauld. The two grew up the perfect terror of all the old wives in the village, so full of mischief and brimming over with wild pranks did they prove. They fought, too, like tigers at times, but were closer friends than ever after a blooded nose or two or a blackened eye—after which friendly truce the village was sure to suffer severely.

Every one prophesied that the “twa deevils,” as they were called, would come to a bad end, and when they grew up to be lads of seventeen or eighteen the prophecies seemed to be in a fair way to be confirmed. Peter Gauld was jilted in love by a smart farming lass upon whom he had set his heart, and, telling the story of his wrongs in a heart-broken way to Lindsay, said he was going off to Glasgow to enlist or drown himself.

“I’ll go too,” said Jacob Lindsay, as promptly as when they had been boys, and one had proposed the stripping of an apple tree or the scaling of a precipice for a starling’s nest; and they went accordingly. The friends of both were in good positions; but when the novelty of their trip to Glasgow wore off, and their last shilling was spent, they neither thought of walking back to their native village, nor of writing home for the means to bring them.

“Our money’s all done,” said Peter one day to his companion. “I wouldn’t care to go back *there* again to see her smiling and laughing at me, and she isn’t worth drowning one’s self for; so I’m going to ’list. Maybe when she sees in the paper that I’m killed in battle;” and there the boy’s voice quivered, and Jacob nodded in grave sympathy—“when she reads of me being shot through the head, or——”

“Or cut into a hundred bits by a shell or a cannon ball,” tenderly suggested Jacob.

“Yes, or run to the heart by a bayonet,” dolefully pursued Peter, “she’ll think of me and be sorry. You can come and see me ’list, if you like, and I’ll give you enough to take you home out of the bounty money.”

"I'll come and see it, but I won't take any of the money," said Jacob.

"Why?"

"'Cause I'm going to 'list too," said Jacob, with the utmost coolness; and before night the two rather handsome and fresh-faced country lads were in the service of Her Majesty the Queen.

The two "reprobates," as they were now called, might have been "bought off" twenty times over, but neither would hear of such an ignominious ending to their freak. Singly they might have been only too glad to get out of the severe life they had entered upon, but together they were immovable. As for Peter Gauld's love affair, it was forgotten in a few months, and in less than a year his heart had caught another flame in a bright-faced, bonny lass in Stirling, to which place their regiment had been drafted.

"You'll tire of her in a month," said Jacob with a slight scowl, for the new notion of his companion robbed him of much of his friend's society; but he was mistaken. Peter stuck to his sweetheart most faithfully, and finally applied for leave to marry her.

"You're going to ruin, and I've a good mind to hate you," was Jacob's jealous comment.

He never bothered with sweethearts, and because he happened to be a few minutes older than Peter, always assumed a dictatorial, fatherly tone when addressing his friend; but the hate never came, and when at last Peter obtained the tardy consent and married the lively and energetic "Libby," as she was called, Jacob's jealousy gradually wore away, till at length he looked upon her as a sort of sister, and swore by her, and would have fought for her as devotedly as Peter himself.

A year or two after this the Crimean war began, and the two were drafted thither with their regiment—Libby, to their great joy, being one of the privileged wives allowed to go to the East with them. The hardships and sufferings they were facing were little dreamt of then; and when sickness spread through the troops, poor Libby, after fairly spending herself for the good of the sick soldiers, sank steadily, and died one night, amid the howling of the storm and the boom of cannon, in the arms of her husband and Jacob Lindsay. A torn tent sheltered the dying woman but imperfectly from the driving rain, and her last look was one of deep gratitude to Jacob, when he raised her only child, Little Liz, as she was called, and shielded her

from the wet in his big, grey overcoat, close to the dying woman.

"I'll never forget that look," he said to me, when narrating the incident. "It seemed to say more than any words could have done; it was like Good Jacob! kind Jacob! true friend! look after Little Liz, and don't forget her poor father when I'm gone."

Poor Peter, when he fairly awoke to the knowledge that his faithful and hard-working wife was gone, wearily shook himself and said to Jacob—

"I hope I'll be done for in the next sortie. I can't live without her, and I don't want to."

But Jacob only put little Liz into the empty arms, and said bravely, with his own voice nearly choked—

"Don't speak like that, old fellow! we must think of little Liz."

The prattle and winning ways of the little girl partly weaned the sorrowing soldier from his great loss; but from that hour he became a solitary and listless man, rousing to something of his old fire and brightness only when the call to arms rang out, and troops were forming to rush to the front and have hundreds of their numbers mown down by showering bullets and bursting shells. In all these expeditions and sorties and battles, Jacob watched his friend with a father's care, always stuck by his side, on duty or off, and saved him from many a danger at the risk of his own life.

One morning when they ran out at the ringing blast of the bugle, Jacob noticed that his companion looked particularly bright and smiling.

"If anything comes over me, Jacob, you'll look after little Liz?" he said, inquiringly.

"I don't think you need to ask me that," said Jacob, in an offended tone, and then their hands met, and they were off to meet the flying bullets. One of these found its man, and Jacob felt a worse pang than if it had gone through his own heart when he saw Peter reel and drop.

"Done for at last," was all the wounded man could gurgle. "Poor little Liz!"

Jacob lifted him like a child in his arms, and carried him to the rear; but the stony look of the blanched features, when he had reached the doctor's tent, told him the truth even before the surgeons uttered it. Peter was dead, and little Liz an orphan.

As the war showed no signs of coming to a close, Jacob arranged a passage home to his own friends in Scotland for little Liz. Peter's own relations were either dead or not inclined to burden themselves with the child; but Jacob's mother took to the forlorn child as kindly as if it had been Jacob's own, and, away in the secluded spot in Scotland, read all the news from the seat of war to her, and lists of killed and wounded, trembling lest she should stumble on the name they both loved.

Shortly before the taking of Sebastopol and the close of the war, and while little Liz was poring over her writing or arithmetic in the village school in Scotland, Jacob, in returning from one of the sharp engagements outside the trenches, came on the body of a young Russian soldier—a mere boy, as he seemed, of sixteen or seventeen—lying on his back among the dead, with a bullet hole in his neck. Just below the bullet hole Jacob caught sight of something bright, and, stooping down, drew forth a small gold locket, placed there doubtless by some fond mother or loving sister. The locket was fair loot, and to have left it behind would have been only to leave it to the prowlers who, like jackals, crept forth as soon as the battle was over to strip the dead or dying. A thin chain of gold fastened the locket, which on the outside was engraved in the Russian language with the words, "GOD GUARD THE WEARER."

Jacob had many a thoughtful study of the little trinket, and finally filled the glass within with a blood-stained lock of his dead comrade's hair, and wore it reverently on his own bosom under his shirt; but he little dreamt of the important part it was destined to play in his own history.

The war ended, and Jacob Lindsay, after a short interval at home, was drafted to India and other places, but never near his home in Scotland. He could have left at the end of the ten years' service, but he wanted to earn the pension, and always replied to his mother's letters with the quiet intimation that he would serve the full time, as Scotland had no particular attraction for him. When the twenty-one years expired and he received his discharge, he had only once been at his old home from the time when he and Peter set out for Glasgow, and then, as little Liz was a mere school girl, he had taken little notice of her. All that was to be altered now, though he was already almost an old man.

About a mile and a-half from Mauchline, where the river flows softly along through precipitous red cliffs, crowned with every shade of green wood and wild flowers, stands the old

"Brig of Ballochmyle." Jacob had written home saying he would come by Mauchline, and stating the exact hour when he should arrive; but on reaching the place found no one waiting to greet him, and had started to walk to his native village, when he was pulled up by some vivid recollection at this lovely and secluded spot. He was seated wearily on the parapet of the bridge, with a bundle at his feet, and thinking of the many chequered scenes through which he had passed since he and Peter had wandered there in the joyous freedom of boyhood, when a light step and a blithesome voice, caroling lightly at a love song, made him start round and stare at the stranger approaching. The dress he yet wore—the weary expression of his eyes, and the military cut of his face—appeared to strike the young girl approaching him with equal interest, for she gazed at him with a full, steady look of her bright and sparkling eyes, which at once thrilled him with a nameless pleasure. Her step was buoyant, her cheeks were rosy with health, and her age not above eighteen; yet it was not boldness which caused her to gaze upon him thus, for she was really as shy and modest as she was pretty. Slowly she tripped past him, then paused and faltered back in his direction—

"You are a soldier, aren't you?" she inquiringly said, as he, from force of habit as much as anything, touched his hat in a military salute.

Something in her tone, resembling that of a woman he had known and listened to twenty years before, more than her features or age, prompted him to the joyous, smiling reply—

"I am; and you are not—not little Liz?"

"I'm Liz without the 'little,'" she eagerly returned, springing forward and almost clapping her hands with joy. "You must be dear, dear Jacob?"

"I am!" and with a swoop he lifted her right up in his arms, as he had done a thousand times when she was a child, seated her on the stone parapet beside him, and saluted her in a way not exclusively military.

Nor did little Liz make the slightest demur or objection. She nestled into his grey overcoat as confidently and lovingly as she had done in childhood, and looked up at his kind, brown eyes with all the artless glee of a child recovering a father or a brother.

"I thought you were a young lady, instead of my little Liz," he said, after a little, "you looked so pretty and bright. Don't you know you're grown beautiful?"

"And I made sure it couldn't be you, for I thought you were an old grey-headed man," she as frankly responded, with her cheek leaning on his shoulder. "I wasn't sure but you might be wasted and wounded, but you're quite young and handsome. How proud they will all be at the village to see you, and welcome you back; and they've cause, for there isn't a braver in Scotland."

Jacob felt no more weariness then. Supported by Liz's strong arm he walked the remaining miles to his native place with a lighter step than he had shown for many a day. When just outside the village, with Liz carrying his bundle under one arm, while she supported him with the other, he was surprised to see quite a crowd of people gathered at the top of the road. The whole village seemed to have dropped work, and to be awaiting the arrival of some great man. And when the two slow travellers appeared, Jacob saw many of the hats and caps taken off and waved in the air, and heard a cheer ring out which caused him to start in wonderment and surprise.

"It's you they're welcoming, dear Jacob," said Liz, with her eyes sparkling with joy and emotion. "And hark! there's the guns going off—that's all for you. Hear how they shout! oh, how happy it makes me! and they've done it all of their own accord. Don't tremble and turn pale, dear Jacob—I'll support you up the hill—I could carry you, even, if you wanted—for it's an honour you've won with bravery and goodness."

Jacob had never been a demonstrative man—deep natures seldom are—and he appeared to cower more before the glad shouts and joyous hand-shakings of his old village cronies than he had ever done before the bayonets and bullets of the enemy. He was glad when the excitement of his arrival and welcome was over; and after a few weeks he arranged to accept a post of trust offered him in a factory a few miles off.

Every one said that there could be but one result of Jacob's constant intercourse with the sprightly and affectionate Liz, and for once every one was right. Jacob's mother waxed feeble and old, and shortly before she did pass away whispered something to both her supporters to which they tremulously assented; and six months after the grave had been closed on her, Liz and Jacob were wife and husband. The marriage was a very quiet affair, but the moment it was concluded, those present saw the handsome and not very old soldier unfasten a little chain from his own neck and draw forth a gold locket, which he reverently fastened on the bride, with a strange agitation and eyes moist with tears.

"God guard the wearer!" he whispered, opening the locket and showing a lock of matted brown hair within. "It was his, dearest Liz—my comrade and your father—I cut it from his bleeding head when I carried him from the field. God guard the wearer!" and a single tear fell from the eyes of the young bride in response to the prayer.

My story should end there, with the bride in her beauty, and youth, and innocence shedding a tear over her father's memory, the quiet circle of friends eagerly congratulating the new married pair, and Jacob settled steadily and prosperously at his new work. Why should not everything be happy and joyous, without trials, or tears, or blighted hopes? I know not why; but I do know that in going on I am giving not fiction but truth.

Before marriage Liz had been the belle of the district, with more sweethearts sighing in her wake than she well knew how to evade or shake off. A gay gathering was incomplete without pretty Liz; and the most jealous of her sex had to admit that in dancing she was in grace and neatness queen of them all. After marriage Jacob put no restraint or restriction upon her. He treated her as a father might treat a child, indulging her in every wish, and letting her go whither she listed. Then, while he was deep in his duties at the factory, which swallowed almost every moment of his time, people began to whisper and shake their heads, and the only one who never heard the whispers or saw the heads wagging was poor Jacob Lindsay. His mother had given him her little savings, carefully tied up in an old stocking; and these Jacob, in turn, had made over to Liz, to keep till they should perhaps move into Glasgow and begin business of some kind.

One Saturday night Jacob returned to his cottage after an absence of two days at the factory, and was surprised to find the windows darkened. He tried the door and found it locked, and presently was joined by a neighbour woman, who gravely and pityingly handed him the key, saying—

"I got that frae Mrs Lindsay to gie to you."

"Is she away anywhere?" said Jacob simply, thinking of Saturday's shopping in the village.

"Yes, she gaed awa' this morning"—then the woman stopped short, and Jacob in surprise saw several other neighbours creep forward, all with the same grave and pitying look directed to himself.

"Is there anything wrong?" he cried at last. "Speak out, woman, and let me know it all."

"A guid deal wrang," slowly answered another of the group. "They say that Liz has run awa' wi' her auld sweetheart, Bob Johnston, the publican's son."

Many men would have reeled at the news. Jacob only became more erect, more rigid-featured, more iron-like in firmness.

"They say? who says it?" he asked at last, in a voice without a quiver, but strangely unlike his usual tones.

"Them that saw her gang awa'," said the man, with deep sympathy; and all the others gravely confirmed the news, even adding particulars—as if his heart had not been already stabbed through and through.

Jacob unlocked the door and walked into the house—the neighbours peeping fearfully in after him. Then he struck a light and looked round on the disordered place, and finally went to a drawer, which he opened. Liz's bank-book, containing the careful savings of Jacob's mother, was gone. A gold watch, given to Jacob by an officer in recognition of a great service done him in battle, was also gone, as well as several other valuables equally prized by the owner. There was no message left—what message could a woman leave under such circumstances?—nothing but the dark, deserted home and empty drawers.

Jacob neither stormed, nor wept, nor uttered a groan or a word. He simply sat down and leant his head on his hand, looking wearily and with apparent calmness at his neighbours as they slowly ventured in to console or advise. He was struck full in the heart, and was dumb.

They told him how the runaways had gone to Glasgow, and would probably be found taking passage in one of the liners for America, and strongly urged him to follow at once and recover what he had lost; but Jacob heard all in silence, and finally asked them all, with the utmost calmness, to leave the house and tell him no more.

They obeyed precipitately, thinking him half-crazed, and kept creeping back to the door and peeping in at the window in anticipation of some fearful tragedy; but they always found him seated at the table, leaning his head on his hand, and looking steadily before him with dry eyes. The candle burned down and went out, and moonlight took its place, but Jacob never stirred from his chair. The dawn of the Sabbath morning found him there, and when he moved it was only to put up a screen at the window to keep out prying eyes. The truth

was that he had been fighting with himself as he had never fought in the bloodiest battle. He knew where the runaways might be found; he had a gun in his possession, and had used it to slay hundreds before; killing human beings was not the same to him as to ordinary men, and he knew that to *see* the runaways would be simply to doom them to death.

"I should forget everything, if I but looked on them," he thought for the hundredth time. "And even Liz would die before I knew what I had done—God give me power to save myself and them."

That was his struggle and his prayer, and his desperate fight. How the victory was won none but himself and his God ever knew; but next day he arranged for the sale of every article in the house, and went away, no one knew whither.

"I must bury myself—shut myself up somewhere out of sight, where no one will know me or my story, or attempt to pity me, and where I am sure never to meet *her*," was his thought; and he vanished from the village, leaving not a trace of his whereabouts, and saying not a word to any one as to his intentions. He was poor now, without a situation or anything to depend on but his meagre pension; but that he considered a trifle compared with what might have happened had he overtaken the runaways and got back his own.

"It must have been Johnston that was the robber," he always insisted. "Liz might be weak, or whatever people might call her, but she never could be a thief."

So, after various changes and struggles, Jacob Lindsay landed in Edinburgh, and became known to me as an eccentric and somewhat surly broker. He did not push his trade, and never condescended to argue or haggle. If a customer appeared, he was told the price of the article he wished, and if that did not suit him it was put away without a word; and in the same way, when anything was offered for sale, Lindsay—whose knocking about had sharpened his business faculties—knew almost at a glance what the article would bring, stated his terms, and if refused, curtly ordered the seller out of his shop.

For some years after he appeared in Edinburgh, his life ran its slow course in this way, till the incident occurred which brought me to know his story. One evening in the winter, when other shops in the Cowgate were all lighted up, but Lindsay's, in rigid economy or indifference, was dark, a woman, with a shawl over her head, and so many rags about her person that the wonder was how they held together, timidly crept into

the dark shop and knocked on the counter. There was a light in the back room, the door of which was ajar, but Lindsay was at his dinner, or tea, or whatever he called the meal, and sat on undisturbed till the whim suited him to respond. The woman knocked again, and at last, with a frown on his brow, Lindsay appeared.

He did not look at her face—he had no interest in faces, and seldom noted their features; but something in her accent caught his ear like a sudden strain of sweet music. She came from the west, and that knowledge roused memories of happier days. The frown left his brow, and he took the article offered into his hand.

“How much can you give me for it—it is gold, and I am a stranger here, and poor—very, very poor;” and the haggard look and perpetual shiver which seemed to shake her hands and limbs confirmed her words.

“Some drunken jade wanting a dram,” was his thought as he turned the article to the light streaming from the back room.

Then he started back with both hands clenched, and his eyes almost starting from their sockets, as he read the inscription on the gold locket which had been placed in his hands.

“GOD GUARD THE WEARER! Mine! mine when I was married!” he shouted aloud, with an agitation he had never exhibited since he entered the city. “Woman, where got you this locket?”

He looked up as he hurled forth the impassioned query, but with a low cry like a gasping sob, the shadow had dived out the shop and vanished, and he was looking on darkness and empty space. With one bound he was over the counter and out into the open street, where, with the trinket in his hand, he rushed hither and thither through wynds, and closes, and entries, bareheaded and heedless of jeering remarks from spectators; but his search was vain, and he found no trace of the wretched woman.

An hour or two later he appeared at my house, having been directed thither from the Central Office, so excited and eager that I thought he had gone mad.

“I did not think mortal man would ever have heard my story,” he all but groaned; and then he showed me the locket, and told me all I have put down, and a deal more. There could be no doubt about the identity of the trinket; for though the lock of hair had been removed, the tell-tale words, in Russian, still showed sharply on the back. The only question was

where was the owner, and who was she? Lindsay was hopeful that she might be his lost Liz; I was doubtful, and said so, but agreed to try to trace her. And how did I set about it?

The appearance of the waif was that of a debased and shivering wretch longing for whisky. I tried every public-house for a wide circle round the spot where she had appeared. But I found no satisfactory trace of her—ragged women like her were common at them all, and though they came often, left no trace of their dwelling-place behind them. Other means I tried, also in vain, and then Lindsay in desperation said—

“I’ll give you every shilling I possess to find her if she is my poor Liz, and I won’t shoot her or lay a finger on her—I swear that. I have grown away from that.”

Again I answered him that no such sacrifice was necessary. Then I thought of another aspect of the case. The woman must have been in urgent need of money, or she would never have decided to part with such an article—perhaps she had some one in want or illness to think of—I would try the chemists’ shops. I did so, and came on the true clue almost at once. A woman answering the description came to the shop regularly to buy laudanum; to procure this drug she had produced a medical line, which testified that “Elizabeth Johnston” required to use laudanum constantly, and might be supplied in safety. The address of the patient followed, and thither I turned my steps, with Lindsay moving with ill-restrained swiftness by my side. When we got to the land and the door, I asked for a girl of the name given above, but the coarse landlady, if I may so name her, only said—

“Oh, he means that Glasgow girl, Liz, in the far-off room—tell her M Govan wants her.”

I hastened to say that I did not want her, and led Lindsay to her room, opened the door for him, and then closed it on him, and stood sentry outside. Instantly there rang out a scream—prolonged and awful, and dreadful enough to rouse even that callous houseful; then there was sobbing and crying, and expostulating in the low tones of Lindsay himself, and finally he appeared with a limp and senseless woman in his arms, her thin face gleaming so whitely in the dim lobby that I thought her dead.

“It’s little Liz—my Liz,” he whispered to me. “I will take her away from here. If I cannot be her husband—I can at least be her father.”

She seemed a mere child’s weight in his arms—a tiny, pretty

girl still, with the stamp of sin struggling almost in vain with the childish innocence which had so long dwelt in her sweet face; and he got leave to bear her off unquestioned.

After that the broker's shop was closed, and Lindsay was nursing a sick woman fighting with delirium and fever in the room at the back. Liz might have recovered, and did recover so far; but the want of what she thought a sufficient supply of laudanum one night drove her out thinly clad to the nearest chemist's. Lindsay followed in alarm the moment he missed her, and found her in the act of swallowing it, and covered her up and bore her home in haste; but the chill had reached her lungs, and in two days she was raving in delirium and on the borders of shadowland. For long days and weary nights Lindsay nursed her unceasingly, never leaving her bedside, sparing no pains to gratify her every wish, and thinking of nothing but how to fight off death. At last her slumber became more tranquil and still, smiles dwelt on her face in place of frowns and looks of anguish, and Lindsay thought the crisis was past. But the doctor, when he appeared, only looked gravely at the sleeping woman, ordered nothing, said nothing, and silently took leave. Liz slept on far into the night, muttering and murmuring. Towards morning she opened her eyes, smiling brightly, but evidently seeing little that was near her.

"Oh, and you must be dear, dear Jacob?" she joyfully exclaimed. "I thought you were an old, grey-headed man, but you're quite young and handsome. How proud they will all be at the village to welcome you back; and they've cause, for there isn't a braver in Scotland."

"Hush, Liz! dear child, try to sleep—you're not well," chokingly ejaculated Lindsay, remembering with a pang the scene of their meeting at the Brig of Ballochmyle.

"Who could think of sleep when they knew you were coming home?" persisted the delirious girl. "Do you see them at the top of the road? It's you they're welcoming, dear Jacob—and hark! there's the guns going off—that's all for you. Oh, how happy it makes me, for it's an honour you deserve, and have won with bravery and goodness."

A shivering sob struggled from the breast of the eager listener, while tears, the first that had crossed his eyes since he found her, trickled from his cheek and dropped on her restless hands.

"Yes, Jacob, dear—it is father's—God guard the wearer," she softly whispered, at the touch of the hot tears; but then

her smiles left her, and he had a long and hard struggle to keep her from leaving the bed and the house. Towards morning she got quieter, and for one brief moment looked at him with some intelligence in her eyes.

"You're like Jacob, but he was not grey, and wasted, and old," she said. "Oh, I'm weary, weary—I wish he would come." Then her eyes drooped, and in an hour more she had slumbered into the silent land.

When Liz was buried, Lindsay alone was at the burial. He asked sympathy from none, and even seemed to shun me, who knew the story of his life. Just once, at dead of night, I met him on the streets, when he laid a strong hand on my arm, and said, in answer to my kindly question—

"Afraid I suffer? I do suffer. I want to die and be at rest. I would take my own life without a pang, if I thought God would forgive me."

Not many months after this, one of the wretched tenements at the back of his shop took fire, and the inmates fled in wild confusion before the flames and smoke. Lindsay got out at his back window, and was looking on in silence, when suddenly one of the half-naked women screamed out—

"Oh, where is my bairn? You've forgotten my wee Lizzie! She's left in the house: she'll be burned alive!"

The distracted mother would have rushed into the flames and smoke, but some of the crowd and police held her back; while Lindsay, without saying a word to any one, ran into the burning building, and shortly appeared at one of the windows, and dropped a child into the eager arms outstretched to receive it. He ought to have appeared again in a moment or two, but he did not; and at last a fireman, muffled to the eyes, volunteered to search for him; and groping in among the smoke, found him prostrate on the stair, badly burned, and quite insensible. Lindsay was borne quick and fast to the Infirmary, but only spoke once after the accident.

"Little Liz," he slowly murmured through his swollen and burned lips. "Lay—me—beside—little Liz."

The attendant nurses thought he meant the child he had saved, and I did not trouble to correct the mistake.

A CRACKSMAN'S RUSE.

It is the curiosities in crime which bother us most; those in the plain beaten track being prosy and unromantic enough, and often calling for no special skill in their unravelment. If a man breaks into a jeweller's shop in the ordinary way, and carries off part of the stock, there can be no doubt as to his object in making the attempt, and thence by inference tracing the crime to the likeliest pest of the hour who happens to be on the surface. There is a good deal, too, to be gleaned from the manner in which the job is executed, most cracksmen having a style of their own; but occasionally a case arises so incomprehensible, so far removed from the ordinary run, that we make the strangest blunders in the unravelment.

When the case now before me was reported, the first question which arose in my mind was, "What on earth could be the object of a thief in breaking in there?" A lawyer's office in an upper flat in George Street—a simple pair of rooms containing nothing but an iron safe full of papers, some tin boxes, and a case of law books, with of course one or two desks and writing tables—had been in a mysterious way entered and ransacked. There was no money taken, from the simple fact that money was not kept in the place. By accident a gold watch belonging to the owner of the chambers, the glass of which had been broken the day before, had been left in one of the desks, and this was taken, along with an indiscriminately selected heap of papers, of great value to the loser, including some railway scrip only too easily available at its market value. Strangely enough, an envelope containing £500 in bank notes, which had been left with the lawyer by a friend the day before, and thrust at the moment into the breast-pocket of his office coat, was found safe and untouched. The coat was rather a shabby one, and hung on its nail behind the door exactly as it had been left by its wearer the night before. So much for the plunder taken; but a greater staggerer remained in the means by which the burglar had gained entrance. The rooms formed part of a

whole flat, kept by a worthy couple above every suspicion, and were not only closed with detector locks, but also guarded by an outer door, which was found in the morning firmly locked and bolted on the inside, with the key in the lock, just as it had been left by the keepers before retiring to rest for the night. Nor did the detector locks show any signs of having been tampered with, though the safe had certainly been opened with skeleton keys, or at least keys not originally intended for the lock. I turned to the window, and found it to be four storeys off the ground, and could not believe it possible for the burglar to bring a ladder of that length and use it without discovery. This narrowed the means of entrance to a descent from the roof; but after an examination of the hatches I was doubtful of even that. They were all secured with padlocks, and all locked, and a burglar does not generally trouble himself to close doors so securely behind him.

Such was the case as it stood, and though there was cause for congratulation, inasmuch as the bank notes were safe, the lawyer was nearly distracted at his own losses, and precipitately proposed to offer a reward for the return of the papers, "and no questions asked." I could not allow that, and merely counselled patience, while I tried my best to trace the stolen property and the skilful thief.

In spite of the state of things left by the burglar, I for some time tenaciously held in my own mind that the robber was an amateur, and also some one connected with the office, and possessing means of admittance suspected by none. Yet I found that by working in this belief I made absolutely no progress; and getting the use of a slater's ladder and ropes, I ascended to the roof and made an examination from the hatch to the edge of the roof, with the result that I found the zinc rhone pipe slightly bent inwards at a spot directly above one of the office windows, as if a rope had been there suspended and heavily strained. Assuming that this had been the means of entrance, I promptly decided that no amateur would have risked his life in this way, with only the tenacity of a few strands of hemp to preserve him from a beautiful smash upon the pavement below. This done, I pondered as to the likeliest man among my own "bairns" to try such a feat, and would have at once plumped on "Fifty-two Tom," had the smallness of the stake not staggered me. It was incredible to me that this man, who had no lack of brute courage, as well as cunning and skill, and a quickness of decision that would have made his fortune

several times over in any honest walk of life, should risk so much for so little. Still more puzzling was it to me how he should ever have gone near such a place in hope of plunder; but mystified as I was, I thought it could do no harm to try and see him, and if possible "sound" him on the point. I had tried others without success, and my reasons for trying him were that I was nearly at the end of my tether, and that I knew he had a liking for working a job single-handed, and thus being bothered with no division of profits. The very way in which his odd name was earned illustrates this practice of his. "Fifty-two" was not Tom's prison number, but the number of a shop in the new town, which Tom persisted in trying to break into. Tom tried it once, and was scared, chased, and caught, and got six months. Then thinking, perhaps, of Robert the Bruce's spider and the lucky number seven, he tried it again, was caught, and narrowly escaped conviction. He was detained, and got two years on another charge, but the very week after his term expired, he tried No. 52 again, and this time had the immortal reward, in the shape of seven years' penal—another illustration of how perseverance and the number seven are eternally united.

To "Fifty-two Tom," therefore, I turned, not very sanguine of success, nor at all hopeful that this very wary old bird would be easily caught with chaff.

I met him in the Canongate one afternoon, strolling easily along with a pipe between his teeth, and he gave me a cool and patronising nod as was his wont. This nod always seemed to me to say, "Ah, you think yourself smart because you took me once, but try me now." I was continually trying, but not with great success.

"I say, 'Fifty-two,' do you know anything of that job in George Street?" I suddenly asked, pulling up and watching his face keenly.

A novice in crime would at once have pulled on an innocent or an ignorant look, and exclaimed, "What job? Never heard of it," &c., &c.; but not so "Fifty-two."

"Lawyer's place—lot of papers and a gold watch?" he inquiringly said in his thieves' Latin, speaking with the utmost coolness.

"Yes."

"I read about it in the papers," he calmly answered. "What of it?"

"You weren't in it, were you?"

"No."

This answer meant nothing. Whether in it or not, of course, I never dreamt of him saying "Yes."

We eyed each other for a moment or two steadily, like two skilled fencers, each wondering what ruse or feint the other would next attempt.

"Those papers are wanted badly," I at length suggestively remarked. "I daresay money might be given for them, if we could get the cracksman along with them who did the job."

"I never betray a pal," said Tom with virtuous severity, after a thoughtful pause, "so even if I could spot the cove, I'd be the last to do it. But the papers might be got," he hastened to add, with some eagerness; but then I had to check him.

"They are of no use without the thief," I coldly remarked; "at least I cannot treat for them, and what's more, the lawyer, Mr Graham, will not treat for them either. We've taken care to bind him to that."

A slight shade of disappointment, it struck me, crossed the face of the wary criminal as I spoke, but he affected the utmost indifference, coolly beginning to cut some tobacco for his pipe, and saying—

"In that case, I should say they'll go into the fire very quick. At least, if it was me, I should do that; but one can never tell what some coves will try."

"No, one can never tell," I echoed, with an unmoved countenance; "but if you should hear of them, you know the way the wind blows—money for them, and the man who did the job."

I did not know it then, but I had given "Fifty-two" Tom subject-matter for deep thought. One more effort I made to get at him.

"What a bungling stupid he must have been that did it," I observed, "to go and pass over £500 in bank notes."

"Very stupid," he said, with fierce energy and a much stronger word for the adjective.

We parted there, and Tom went up the High Street, pondering and planning and scheming over what I had said. "I never betray a pal," meant about as much with him as the "No" had meant when I asked if he had been in the robbery. Its real interpretation was, "As long as I'm all right with my chums and likely to make something out of them, they're safe; when I'm not, let them look out."

Now Tom had a grievance, and he had at that very moment

a friend, to betray whom would have given him the sincerest and most unqualified satisfaction. The only difficulty in the way was that Tom's friend did not happen to be the burglar, while he himself did happen to be that very individual. Volumes might be written on the ruptures and quarrels between thieves and fences; each is necessary to the existence of the other; but when it comes to a question of risk, the thief bears nearly all, and so places himself sadly at the mercy of his more cautious ally.

The name of Tom's friend and fence was M'Guire, otherwise "Snapping Andy." Andy had earned this name from a playful habit he had, when in difficulties with the police, of dropping on the ground and snapping at their calves with his teeth. He was well known in consequence. A knock or a bruise soon heals and is forgotten; but an inch or two out of one's leg is a more lasting souvenir. The cause of the rupture was simple. On the night of the robbery, and long before it was known to the police, "Fifty-two Tom" had called on "Snapping Andy," at his home and place of business in Leith Wynd, and offered him a gold watch, wanting the glass, for sale. It was a valuable watch—worth at least £20 second-hand—and they both knew it, and could agree on every point but the price to be paid for it. After much argument on both sides, Andy paid down £3, declaring that he had no more ready cash about him, but that he would pay the difference next day. On the following day "Fifty-two" called for the money, but by this time the news of the robbery had got abroad, and "Snapping Andy," having his client absolutely in his power, insisted on Tom showing him the stolen papers, that he might estimate their value and perhaps buy them. This proposal did not meet with Tom's approval, and they thereupon quarrelled hotly; and as a matter of course "Fifty-two" got no more money, but, on the contrary, was plainly told to be off, or he would find himself in my hands.

All this was very galling, and the more so as Tom found himself helpless to retaliate. He brooded over his wrongs, and turned things up in every possible way; but though he had no lack of cunning, there is a limit to the inventive powers even of such a rascal, and he could hit on no feasible scheme until my suggestive remarks gave him the clue to his course of action.

Dropping in at "Snapping Andy's" shop, he once more asked if that gentleman meant to "stump up," adding, by way of casual news,—

"I saw M'Govan just now, and he says there's to be a big sum given for them papers."

"I knew there would be," returned Andy, with interest and some excitement. "If you had let me manage that business it would have been done by this time, and the money paid. Every man to his own line, you know."

"I'd be sure to trust you after the watch business," said Tom, with a scowl.

"I will pay you the rest of the price agreed on, honour bright, as soon as I get the money," said Andy, with great gravity. "What more would you have?"

"Nothing—if you do that, it's all I ask," said Tom sceptically; "but you don't touch the papers for all that. I have them put away in a safe hide, and I'm keeping an eye on the spot, just to make sure nobody taps my mine. They'll stand lying by for a bit—the price is not likely to get less by holding on to them for a while."

Many protestations of honour and integrity were showered on him by the eager "Snapping Andy," and offers the most tempting added if Tom would but indicate the hiding-place of the papers, and leave Andy to conduct the delicate negotiation with the owner; but to all "Fifty-two" turned a deaf ear.

"I think I know where your hide is," at last remarked Andy at a venture.

With considerable skill "Fifty-two" assumed an alarmed expression and cried—

"Never! Where is it?"

"No matter. Don't be astonished if you find them gone, and the whole thing arranged without you," said Andy, with a knowing look, and wishing to keep up the alarm. "Will you agree to let me work the thing out or no?"

"No," and with this apparently furious retort "Fifty-two" left the shop, with some show of concern and alarm in his cunning features. Andy watched him from the door of his den, and noting that "Fifty-two's" pace was much swifter and more business-like than usual, suspected that he had really frightened him, and concluded to follow him at a safe distance.

"He's maybe off to see after his hide now. If I can get the least inkling where it is, I can easily work out the rest myself," was Andy's reflection; and as he considered himself the most cunning man in existence, not excepting "Fifty-two," his course was at once decided. Drawing on a greasy cap, and shouting to his wife to look after the second-hand boots and shoes which

formed the blind to his real business, he followed "Fifty-two" up the High Street as far as George IV's Bridge, and was more than gratified to find that his friend appeared suspicious of being watched and followed, and was continually looking back, though never as it seemed actually catching sight of the fence. Less cautiously he traversed the Bridge, and got to the head of the Meadow Walk, still apparently ignorant of the fact that he was being followed. It was a fine, bright afternoon, though late in the year, and the middle-walk was crowded with people; so Andy had little difficulty in keeping "Fifty-two" in sight without being himself seen. But when the corner of the West Park was reached, there came a change, for "Fifty-two" entered the West Park, and Andy hesitated to follow for fear of being detected. At that time the shrubberies of both East and West Parks were fenced at that part by a high, unsightly wooden fence, instead of the low light iron rail at present surrounding them; and as "Fifty-two" no sooner entered the park at the corner than he turned to cross it almost in a line with the middle walk, Andy simply walked straight down the centre avenue, keeping a sharp eye on "Fifty-two" from behind this high wooden fence. When nearly across the park, "Fifty-two" suddenly paused within about five paces of a solitary tree which stands there to this day, and looking down on the greensward, appeared to press the turf down once or twice with his right foot, and then passed on, got through the fence at a turnstile farther on, and disappeared.

"Got it, I believe," muttered "Snapping Andy;" and after a pause to allow "Fifty-two" to be well away, he left the shelter of the railings, and crossed boldly towards the tree. There were many children and others playing about, or enjoying a stroll in the park, and Andy was forced from motives of caution not to appear too curious; but he nevertheless managed to discover what he thought was a distinct cut in the turf at the spot which he had seen his friend and pal press down with his foot, and by negligently appearing to lie down on the grass for a few moments, he managed to mark the spot by thrusting into it his own well-worn tobacco knife, and there leaving it, with the end of the haft just far enough out of the ground to be easily felt in the dark. It does not appear what "Fifty-two" was about, or where he was posted during this arrangement, but I have little doubt that he was witness to the whole proceeding from some adjacent coign of vantage.

These delicate manoeuvres over, "Snapping Andy," after

noting well the position of his knife in relation to the tree, left the Meadows and went straight back to his den, where he exultantly penned an anonymous note to Mr Graham, stating that he had a clue to where the stolen papers had been hidden by the burglar, and would return them on payment of a suitable ransom. This note was duly received next morning, but as I have now to show, it was by that time of little value. To understand how so much generosity was thrown away, and at the same time illustrate the bitter injustice which at times is meted out to the able and virtuous fence, it is necessary to follow the movements of "Fifty-two" after so unsuspiciously indicating the spot where his plunder lay concealed.

"Fifty-two" walked straight from the Meadows to my house and asked for me. I chanced to be at home, and left the table the moment I heard his voice, pretty sure of what was coming.

"You said money was offered for them papers," he cautiously began.

"Yes, with the man that did it."

"Oh, in course, in course," he readily returned. "Well now, how much might they be worth, with the cove that did it?"

I thought for a moment, eyeing him closely all the while, and then said—

"Twenty pounds."

"It's too little—it won't do," was his prompt rejoinder.

"That's not my fault—it's not I who offer the money," I sharply returned. "Take it or want it."

"I think I'll take it," he graciously concluded, after a pause to consider. "Just write down that I'll be paid that, and put your name to it, and I'll tell you all I've found out."

"I won't. My word is as good as any paper. You must be content with that or nothing."

"Fifty-two" had another grave consultation with himself, and knowing me well, conceded that point also.

"I'm to get £20 whenever the lawyer gets back his papers?"

"Yes, if you yourself have not had a hand in the job."

"Oh, that's settled. D'ye think I'd come and tell you all about it if I was the thief?" he said, with an innocent smile.

"You're bad enough for anything," I snarled, getting impatient.

"Thank you. Your opinion's worth something," he said, evidently highly flattered, and wishing to bestow a little subtle praise on me in return.

"Out with it then—who's the man?"

"I never betray a pal," he repeated, with all the unflinching

integrity of a bank director. "I'll tell you how you may nab him and the papers too, but don't ax his name nor nothing. If you get him, good and well; the job is yours, not mine—see?"

I was trying hard to see, but not succeeding over well. Certain that he was dealing double, I nevertheless was far from understanding the whole drift of his words and revelations.

"Well, the papers is planked somewhere in the West Park of the Meadows," he at last ventured to say. "Is there a tree there, standing by itself near the south-east corner?"

"There is," I answered, after a moment's thought.

"Well, it's somewhere near that tree—how near I don't know; but as they're like to be lifted to-night, you can get the spot watched, and see the whole thing for yourself."

"How is that to be done? Watch a spot in the middle of an open park? That's a nice easy task!"

"Oh, that's just the thing you're good at," said the sly rogue. "There's houses on the other side of the walk, with gardens before them, and there's the trees on the walk, and if you're particular to be close at hand, you can go up the tree itself and just drop on him. Ha, ha! that's good—drop on him when he's lifting the plunder."

"Have you any idea how the job was planned? I mean what possessed the man to break into an empty office in the way he did?" I asked, after a few more questions.

"Oh, yes, I heard all about that," said "Fifty-two," with a beaming artlessness charming to behold. "It was the bank notes he was after."

"Those that he missed? How did he know they were there?"

"Oh, easy enough. He was standing at the bar down at the Theatre, having a glass of beer, when a couple of swells came in, an' began arranging how they would go out that night for a spree. 'But I've got £500 on me,' says one, 'and I might lose it.' 'Oh, leave it with Graham till to-morrow,' says the other; 'he can lock it in his safe for you. Off you go, and I'll wait here till you come back.' He went away to George Street, and the clever cove as I'm a speakin' on followed him, and saw from a painted sign at the bottom of the stair, that Graham's was on the fourth flat. The swell wasn't long there, and then the cracksmen he inspected the place, and saw that it could only be done from the roof."

"But he didn't get the money after all?"

"No, that was the d—d—I mean the blasted stupidity of

him. And he did give the bottom pockets of the old coat a squeeze too, though never thinking a lawyer would be so careless as put money in his breast-pocket, and leave it hanging there so innocent like; and there they were all the time, more's the—fortunate thing for the lawyer."

"He'd felt rather bad, I suppose, at missing the prize?" I suggested, with a grin.

"Bad! If it had been me, I'd a sworn myself black in the face," said Tom, with energy. "And it wasn't an easy job either. Think of the risk—if that rope had broke, there'd been an end of him."

"Yes; but it would have saved me a deal of trouble, and been a great benefit to the world," I callously remarked—a sentiment from which 'Fifty-two' dissented somewhat tartly.

After some further conversation, "Fifty-two" arose to go; but before doing so let fall rather a curious remark.

"I'm the only one that knows about the robbery but himself, and it's possible that if you nab him he may suspect, and then round on me out of spite."

"Very possibly he may."

"But you won't believe him?" he somewhat anxiously continued.

"Neither him nor you—the evidence must speak for itself," I curtly answered, and with this he had to depart content.

It then wanted but an hour of sunset, and I had little enough time to make my arrangements. I sent out M'Sweeny at once to loiter in sight of the spot without himself being seen, and as soon as it was dark followed with other two men, whom I planted much further away than I wished, though in sight of the tree. As for myself, there was nothing for it but to get a "back" from M'Sweeny, and clamber up the tree and seat myself as comfortably as possible among the strong branches.

The night luckily was a dark one; but to prevent accidents I had drawn a crape over my face, and covered my hands with black cloth gloves, after buttoning my coat to the throat to cover every scrap of white likely to show in the dark.

I began to weary of the task, and my bones were aching with the horribly hard seat; but about twelve o'clock I had my reward, for then a man muffled to the ears appeared, and began to grope cautiously over the turf below my perch. After some patient crawling and feeling with his hands, the man produced a trowel, and after a swift look around, began to turn up the turf, and throw out the earth with marvellous celerity. A

moment or two sufficed for the task; the trowel struck on something metallic, and in a moment he had tugged out a tin deed case, such as lawyers use, which he opened with a subdued exclamation of delight, revealing for a moment the fact that it was filled to the lid with papers of various kinds. That was all the length I could allow him to go. With one spring I was down at his back, with my two hands knotted firmly to his throat, carrying him over on his face, box and all, with the impetus I had gained in the descent. Though taken completely by surprise, the man instantly made desperate efforts to wriggle round so as to face me; but I pounded his face deep into the dirt he had thrown out, whistling out sharp and shrill to the others, only too conscious of my inability to hold him long. M'Sweeny was the first to reach us, and the moment his leg was within reach of the wriggling ruffian's face it was seized by the calf in a set of dog-like teeth, and bitten nearly through. M'Sweeny's frightful yell as he dropped on the ground quickened the movements of the other two, and they pinned him by the legs and hair, not a moment too soon, while I pulled back his arms and snapped the handcuffs on his wrists in spite of every contortion and effort he made to elude the steel.

"I'm murdered—I'm kilt!" groaned M'Sweeny. "Begorra, if it's not Snapping Andy ye've got, I'll let him nibble off the calf of me other leg free gratis."

I wrenched the crape from my own face, and the men turning our prisoner over at the same moment, we simultaneously recognised each other.

"M'Govan!" he cried, in abject surprise.

"Snapping Andy!" I returned, even more astonished than my prisoner. "Why, what on earth took you so far out of your own line? I thought fencing paid you too well for you to trench on the cracksmen's ground?"

"You don't mean to say I had anything to do with the robbery?" he shouted, with a wonderfully concerned and horrified look. "I can swear I never touched or saw these papers or that tin box before."

"Ay, you're good at swearing," I coolly returned, while the others laughed derisively.

"He'll be swearing next that he hasn't taken his supper off my leg," said M'Sweeny, with a groan.

"I can clear myself—I can prove an *alibi*. I can tell you who it was that did the job," he desperately persisted; then, after a start and a pause, he muttered with a deep oath, "I

believe it's all been a trap, and I've been done by that —— 'Fifty-two Tom.' He's your man. Get him, and I'll bear witness against him."

"It's too late; we've got one man, and that will do in the meantime," I coldly returned.

"You've no proof," he shouted.

"Tuts—and you taken with the box in your hand? Take him away;" and helping up the groaning M'Sweeny, and giving him a lean all the way, we left the Meadows perfectly satisfied with our night's work.

When nearing the Central Office, a shabby figure sidled up to us and raised its hands in affected surprise, and with a growl Andy recognised "Fifty-two Tom."

"What have you took him for?" he inquired of one of the men; and being answered, he appeared more horrified than ever, and in a tone of virtuous reproach exclaimed, "Oh, Andy, how could you try that?—every man to his own line!"

A torrent of furious declamation from Andy followed. He wanted us to seize "Fifty-two" there and then; but that worthy showed his sense of security by coolly entering the Office with us, and adding several statements tending to further implicate Andy. On examining the tin case, I was disappointed to find that everything was there but the gold watch.

"P'raps you'll get it down at his shop," suggested Mr "Fifty-two;" "but he's got some patent hides, so it's possible you'll not nose it."

Andy was locked up after making a vigorous and emphatic statement to the effect that "Fifty-two" was the real thief, and then I paid a visit to his shop. This was ostensibly a place where second-hand boots and shoes could be bought and sold, Andy in his prison experience having learnt enough of the art to be able to cobble a little. I searched high and low for the watch; but though I laid bare more than one hide, I found them all empty, and was beginning to fear that the watch had been got rid of in the usual way through some of the export agents, when my attention was attracted to a pair of remarkably heavy boots standing on an upper shelf. The peculiarity of this pair was that one of them was covered with dust, while the second appeared to have been only recently handled and was almost clean. I looked at the boots, felt inside of them, and then turned them bottom up, when I was at once struck with the size of the heels, which were not fitted with iron plates. like the soles, but with a smooth and almost nail-less piece of

leather. I looked at the heel closer; and while M'Sweeny held the candle nearer, I tried to pinch and prise at the edge with the point of my knife. As I did so, my eye chanced to light on the scared face of Andy's wife, whom we had roused out of bed to make the search, and in the terrified glance she returned, I read that I was at last on the right scent. Another dig or two of the knife brought the top of the heel clean away, when I found that it had simply been glued on—the heel itself being a hollow box in which was snugly imbedded Mr Graham's watch, glassless, but sound as when it had left his office.

We had now as good a case against Andy, so far as evidence was concerned, as we could have wished for, and he was brought to trial, with his wife, shortly after. "Fifty-two Tom" would have been happy to tender his evidence, but having a strong case we politely declined the offer.

Snapping Andy was convicted of the robbery—innocently, of course, but that mattered little—and sentenced to ten years' penal on account of his reputation and previous convictions.

"Ah, Andy, every man to his own line!" reproachfully observed "Fifty-two Tom" from the front row of the audience, as his friend was being led away. "You'll have time to sharp your teeth against coming out again."

"Ay, and a knife too—look out!" was the savage answer; and then he went off to his ten years', and his wife to her six months', while good, innocent "Fifty-two Tom" accompanied me to Mr Graham's, and received the sum of £20 as the reward of virtue.

During the progress of the case I had striven hard to enmesh him too, but Andy's wife unfortunately had not been cognisant of the watch having been bought from him, so "Fifty-two" went off in great elation to squander the £20. Of course I soon had him for something else, and he at his own request was sent to a different prison from that which sheltered his friend Andy. "Fifty-two" was the first to reappear in Edinburgh, but then he was in broken health and had to find refuge in the Infirmary. While he was still there, and making no progress towards recovery, a visitor was one day announced at the usual visiting hour in the afternoon—a man who came into the ward saying, "Where is my dear friend, 'Fifty-two Tom?'"

Weak as he was, "Fifty-two" sprang up with a cry of terror when he recognised the face of Snapping Andy. Then before any one could enterpose, Andy's fingers were clenched about the throat of the unhappy scoundrel, and he had him

dragged out of the room, across the wide stone lobby without, and then hurled bodily down a whole flight of steps to the landing below. Nor was that all; for he instantly followed up the attack on the senseless man by kicking and worrying him, and then was beaten and mauled and half-killed before he was dragged off. "Fifty-two" was borne back to bed, and ended his days there a month or two after, while Snapping Andy went back to prison, where he one day so distinguished himself by snapping at the calf of a convict's leg, that the man in self-defence slipped off his iron-shod shoe, and gave him a neat tap on the temples, which ended his snapping for ever.

A WAIF OF THE GUTTER.

No one who remembers seeing Molly Slater singing on the street, in slush, or rain, or snow—generally near the High Street well, below the Tron—will think of that little bundle of rags having a story. Molly had but one song—"Home, Sweet Home;" and as her voice through constant exposure had degenerated to a kind of hoarse croak, I'm afraid her singing could hardly be called a musical success. I dare not speculate as to Molly's age: she looked about ten or twelve; but I have often thought she must have been far below that, and merely aged with buffetings, and cruel blows, and starvation, and cold. For a while she carried a child in her arms, tucked close in to her with a shawl; but even then she did not make a fortune. People said it was a shame to have such a child exposed, and shut their pockets and passed on. It was a shame, undoubtedly, but then the shame wasn't Molly's. Only the care and concern, and hunger and cold, were hers—the shame all belonged to Abe Slater, her loafing, thieving, drunken father.

Abe Slater was at regular intervals dropping into our hands, and during those retirements Molly's appearance was wont to improve somewhat. The look of wolfish hunger was partly smoothed from her face, the scared glance left her eyes, and part of the grime of months disappeared from her face. But regularly as Abe's term expired, Molly was over at the jail gate meeting him, and then she quickly merged once more into a legitimate bundle of rags.

That was all I knew of her from casually seeing her. She was very dirty—how could she be otherwise when she had no home, and slept "nowhere?" But I looked forward a few years, and thought of the time when she would surely rub off part of her dirt, and accept a livery of finery more degrading than her rags. What else could come of such a training? I had no idea of that bundle of rags having a single thought higher than the gutter.

One day, however, a little light was let into my mind by the bundle of rags herself. I was going down South Gray's Close, when I saw Molly crouching on a stone step at a stair foot, and thought I would have a word with her. I daresay the thought of speaking to her would never have entered my head had she not, much to my surprise, greeted me with a friendly smile—the first I had ever seen on her pale face.

"You are Abe Slater's girl, I think?" I said, pausing with one foot on the stair, which I had to ascend on business.

"Yes, I'm Molly," she answered frankly.

"You seem to know me?" I said, wondering at the change a smile made on the misery-lined little face.

"Oh, yes; everybody knows you," said Molly. "You took father the last time."

There was no reproach or bitterness in the tone; she seemed to accept the "taking" as part of her fate; yet I thought proper to justify the action.

"I would rather not take anybody, Molly, but I must do my duty."

"Yes, I know; but father won't always be troubling you. He'll mend some day."

"What?" I cried, so astonished as to be completely off my guard, and to show the incredulity I felt.

"You don't think he's too bad to mend?" said Molly, with a surprised look in turn. "He wasn't always poor, and a drunken man, and a—a—you know what. He had once men working under him; that was long ago, when mother was living and Bubbzie."

"And who was Bubbzie?"

"That was my wee brother. He used to go out with me—singing—up at the well."

"And where is he now?" I asked simply.

A curious, quivering contortion came over Molly's lips, and they worked spasmodically for a moment or two without a word rising to her lips. Then her eyes filled, and with an enforced gasp she blurted out the one word—

"Dead."

Secretly I thought that it was perhaps better so, but I said—

"I suppose you miss him a good deal?"

"Miss him? I think all the heart is gone out of me since he was took," she huskily quivered forth. "Oh, I didn't think anything hard when I had Bubbzie; but now, if it wasn't for father, I'd want to be dead too."

I could scarcely sympathise with such a sentiment, which I knew would be quite thrown away on a brute like Abe Slater, and merely grunted out a dry—

“Imphm.”

“It wasn’t so bad when mother was alive,” continued Molly. “We had always a house of our own then, and mother used to wash and clean, and do lots of things for money to feed us.”

“I think we had her, too, once?” I thoughtfully observed.

“Yes, but it was for *him*,” breathed the child in a hushed whisper. “He sold some of the things she had got out to wash, and he kept out of the way drinking till the people wouldn’t wait any longer, and mother was took up for it, when you found out where the things were.”

“But she pleaded guilty?” I said, with a new light breaking in on me.

“Yes, just to save him. If I could save him and make him better I’d do just the same—the same! I’d be glad to die and be shut up in a hole in the ground if it would make him leave off drinking. It’s the drinking does it all; he’s not a thief or a bad father by nature.”

“He won’t seem that to you, of course,” I dryly answered, “but I’m afraid he’s a brute. Some one told me that he actually stripped your mother of the only blanket covering her when she was dying, and then, insensible with the drink it brought, lay snoring on the floor through the night while she was freezing to death.”

“Yes, but it was the drink too,” said Molly, with her tearful eyes turned up to my face. “He didn’t know what he was doing—I know he didn’t—for when I was crying over mother, and he woke up with the noise and heard she was dead, he said, ‘Well, don’t bother over her—that won’t do her any good—but get me something to drink, for the love of God!’”

“What a pity he wasn’t taken instead of her,” I said, with undisguised pity and indignation.

“No, no; he’ll mend—he won’t be always so bad,” said Molly with a shiver.

“Never in this world, I fear.”

“Did you never know of any one as bad changing?” said Molly, with a tinge of despair crossing her pinched face.

I thought instantly of Simon Penbank,* but as swiftly remembered that that singular character had hidden some-

* See *Hunted Down*; or, *Recollections of a City Detective*, p. 205.

where in his bloated frame a heart, and I began to fear that Abe Slater had none.

"Well—yes—I have known such a thing, but not often," I dubiously answered, after a pause.

"Then it's possible with my father?" she joyfully cried, clasping her hands and looking up with her grimy face almost radiant.

"Possible?—yes, it's possible," I said, with a peculiar emphasis on the last word.

"Then would you try to help me to make him better?" she eagerly pursued.

"Me? how?—that is scarcely in my power," I said, rather staggered.

"What does the jail generally do to people that are not quite bad?" said the little oracle, as a kind of clincher.

I was so taken aback that I lost ground a little, and admitted that it generally made them worse.

"That's just it," cried Molly, quite delighted at having clinched me. "Now, if *we* could keep father out of jail as much as possible—save him from it, you see—he would get better instead of worse."

The argument was scarcely sound, but I was upset a little, and said "Yes."

"Well, will you promise to help me to keep him out of jail as much as you can?"

Again I said "Yes," with the reservation that if he infringed the law he would certainly have to suffer for it.

Molly, however, had eagerly grasped at the promise, and taken my hand in her own for a warm and reverential clasp in ratification of the queer compact.

I was in the act of turning away to ascend the stair, when a sudden thought struck me, and I paused.

"What was it put into your head the idea of bettering yourself, Molly?" I quietly asked. She thought for a moment, and then said—

"It was father."

"What, he? that brute? how?"

"There was a lady passed me one day on the street with a little girl—so beautiful and pretty dressed—oh, she was like a wee angel! I was singing, and the lady sent the wee beauty with a penny to me. I'd have given some pennies to have been let kiss her, but I'm too dirty. When she was gone, I ran to the entry where father was waiting and gave him the

penny, saying what a pretty wee lady had given me it. He swore and said—'You'd be just as pretty if you wore as fine clothes.' I'd never thought of that before, and I said, 'Then why haven't I fine clothes, father?' but he only gave me a drive, and went into the whisky shop, saying, 'Off you go to your singing—there's a beautiful shower of rain coming on.'"

"And that set you thinking of the cause, eh?"

"Yes, that and another thing. I was up in Parliament Square one night—that was in summer, when it was nice and warm—and I got into a crowd where a man was speaking out of a wooden box they'd put up for him. He was speaking about drink, and he said there was a demon in the whisky bottle, but he was so thin and so mixed up, and like the colour of the whisky, that you couldn't see him. Well, I knew father had taken a lot of whisky, so some of that demon must have got inside of him. If I can only get it out, father will be all right."

"Well, and do you think you'll manage that?"

"I've been trying hard, but I've not got on very well. You see there always keeps more of the demon getting in."

I shook my head and made no remark, simply because I thought her task a hopeless one. "Where do you sleep at night, Molly?" I at last inquired.

"Oh, I've lots of places to sleep, where nobody disturbs me or comes near but the rats, and they're friends. I've one rat that likes me, and comes and gets part of my supper when I've any. They can't take him away as they did Gudgeon's dog. He loved me and would have done anything for me. He was awful sorry for me when wee Bubbzie died, and he cried just as much as I did; but one day a policeman took him away up to the office with a string round his neck, and he never came back. He had a bad look, just as father has, and I think they killed him. But his badness was all in his face. Poor Grip! I miss him, too—I'm always missing some one."

The lonely little wretch looked so cool and calm in her misery and neglect, and so ingenious in extracting sunbeams from icicles, that I could scarcely look down on her seamed little face unmoved. I fumbled in my pocket, and tried to slip a copper or two into her icy fingers; but she drew back hastily, and, with almost a scared look—

"No, no! don't give me anything, for I'll just have to give it to him. You can't help me, but maybe you'll be able to help him. There's no good in pitying me, or giving me money, or

boots, or clothes, for they'd all go, and only make him worse. We're best to be hard up, and I wish people would give me less than they do."

What answer could there be to such acute and old fashioned reasoning? None. I left the child thus; but I did not get her so easily out of my head. Her pale, ghost-like face haunted me for days and weeks. To my surprise I had discovered a possibility of good in her—an instinctive prompting to something better; and I began to consider how best something could be made of that feeling. I managed to interest some friends, with more means and influence than myself, in her case, and to my great satisfaction found an opening for her which promised great things compared with what she was steadily drifting to. Of course the change demanded an entire separation from her father, and I expected a fierce resistance from him. To my astonishment, however, the stumbling-block was not the father, but the bundle of rags herself. He expressed himself as callously as indifference could make any one; but she promptly declared that, though they had been offering her a palace to live in, and a carriage of gold to ride in, she would not leave her father.

"I'm all he has now," she quietly replied. "He's got no Bubbzie now, and no mother—nobody but me. No, I must take care of father."

So the well-meant attempt came to naught, and Molly was heard as usual croaking out the pleasures of home, which she never experienced or saw. There is a fixed idea in some minds that a little fortune is to be made on the streets by this species of beggary, but the idea is very far from the truth. Molly often croaked away till she was all but frozen dead, where she stood, for but a few paltry coppers, which only whetted but did not quench the insatiable thirst of Abe Slater. Then in the desperate hours which followed, he became a thief and a criminal—never a bold or even a skilful one, because that requires a special and arduous training, but still sufficiently persistent to cause us annoyance. The petty robberies were being constantly reported, and always with some aggravating remark, as to "Where were the police?" or "Why were the sufferers so heavily taxed to pay us for doing nothing?" Now it was a baker's basket of bread left incautiously at some stair foot; then a ham or a keg of herrings from some shop door; then a second-hand coat exposed for sale, or a pair of boots, or a bunch of cured fish. Abe was worse to detect than an

ordinary jail bird, for he appeared to burrow the moment he had committed a crime, and indeed, though often suspected, seldom left behind him evidence enough to convict. But this could scarcely continue. Petty thieving cannot, in the very nature of things, remain so. Those neglected gutter children, who seemed created to be criminals, and begin that way, do not continue it long. At first it is a potato or two snatched from a shop door to pitch at the head of a companion, then apples from inside the shop, then on, on to anything that man has made or God has grown.

Abe grew confident of his powers, and played for higher stakes. He had no confidants or companions from whom to fear betrayal; he never robbed where there was the slightest chance of capture or detection; so in the usual infatuated fashion he never looked to the end, but went blindly forward, grasping madly at bubbles with a thousand pitfalls at his feet.

Very early one morning, and long before I was due at the Office, I was surprised by a visit at my home from little Molly. It struck me that she was paler than usual, even though the dirt and rags were prominent as ever. She kept one hand persistently in her breast while she tremulously opened her negotiations.

"You remember you promised to help me all you could about—about father?" she began.

I did remember, and said so.

"Well, I've brought something for you. I know I can depend on you not doing him any harm. And you won't ask me any questions or anything?"

Somewhat incautiously I gave the required pledge, and holding out my hand, received a gentleman's gold lever, with a fragment of a gold Albert still dangling at the ring. I was about to say very sharply—"Why, where did get this?" when I remembered my promise; and, moreover, a glance into her scared face supplied me with the whole truth.

"That's all now, and I'll have to go," said Molly, in trembling eagerness to be gone.

"Stop a moment, Molly," I said, deeply moved by her famine-stricken face and grateful eyes; and I led her into the kitchen without once alluding to the valuable plunder she had placed in my hands. A cup of hot coffee, and a thick slice of bread and butter, were placed before her, and she was accommodated with a seat close to the fire. Molly took the bread in her hands without a word, and slowly wolfed it up, salting

the scalding coffee with many a silent tear. I verily believe the child was starving, and yet it was impossible to help her out of the rut.

There were unknown capabilities for good in her—there was love, the true spring of all greatness; and there was courage, and tact, and readiness, which were not there through any special training; and with all these gifts, she was bound to drift steadily to destruction. As I stood with my back to her, gazing idly as it seemed out at the window, I could not help sighing over her fate.

A secret terror that I might detain or question her, I believe, made her hurry over the unexpected meal, too concerned to enjoy it. But when she rose, I needed to say nothing. The whole history of the valuable had been as plainly put before me by her scared face as if it had been written there. She grasped my hand with her cold fingers at the door, and was gone; and then I went in to the Office and looked over the night's arrivals as recorded in the books. One was—"Gentleman—drunk—name unknown—watch and part of Albert gold chain missing—no purse."

"Ah, I believe I have the watch, and the bit of chain too," I remarked, as I coolly drew them out; and every one stared as if I had done something wonderful. As soon as the "gentleman" came to his senses, and had paid a visit to the bar of the Police Court, he was able to identify his watch, and to thank me for "my activity and skill" in recovering them so promptly; but he knew nothing of how he had lost them. I was not sorry. If he had, I should have been compelled to take Abe Slater, which would at least have looked like a breach of good faith with poor little Molly. But I was none the less incensed at Abe himself.

"I'll get him before long, and see that he is put out of the way long enough to give her a chance to get out of the gutter," was my mental resolve. It was not difficult for me to guess how Molly, and not a reset, had got hold of the watch and chain. Abe was not an ordinary thief; and as they never lived in a proper lodging or fixed home, it was probable that he had hidden the watch in some hole or corner in the condemned land they at times occupied while he imagined Molly asleep. Possibly he might not even remember hiding it, for he would probably be as drunk as his victim at the time of the crime; but if he did, he was not likely to suspect his own girl, but rather some worthless wretch like himself.

Again I was visited by Molly about a week later, with the same trembling concern and eager anxiety for no questions being asked. This time she brought me a pretty lady's purse containing £17 in bank notes. There had been some silver in the purse when it was missed in Princes Street by its owner, but that was gone. The numbered notes had probably frightened the novice at pocket picking, and he had hidden the purse in the same way as the watch.

This time I was questioned as to who had been the thief, but I could only say in reply with perfect truth that I suspected one man, but had no proof that I was right. The lady was delighted to receive back the purse and notes; and I was more anxious than ever to lime Mr Abe Slater. If he progressed in this way, he would soon be dabbling in every branch of "the profession."

A morning or two later Molly appeared again, this time almost dropping with breathless excitement and fear.

"Oh, I'm afraid I saw father coming along the Cowgate after me," she faintly gasped, as she was admitted. "If he finds me out here, you won't take him up if he strikes me?"

"Won't I? I only wish he may give me the chance," I exclaimed, with energy. "Well, Molly, what is wrong now?" This time Molly's prize was only an old-fashioned silver verge watch, with a bit of brass chain attached, wrenched as I afterwards discovered from the fob of a poor labouring man who had taken more drink than he could carry.

I took the watch in silence, and then noticed for the first time that there was more than the usual dirt on Molly's face. One of her eyes was blackened, and a great dark bruise marked her lower jaw from the ear to the chin, as if some one had printed on that part of her face the width of a poker-point.

"Let me see your face, Molly," I said, examining the wound in hushed interest. "Who did that?"

"Oh, that's nothing, It wasn't father. I'm always getting myself hurt. I don't think anything of that," she hurriedly returned. "But I'm frightened for father—he has looked so strange this while, and perhaps he's watching me. Would you go down first and see that he's not there! He'll go away whenever he sees you."

I obeyed with great alacrity, hoping that I would catch him lounging about, when I determined to make short work with him. But the cautious and thoroughly cowardly Abe was not to be seen; and after a search about I returned and told Molly

she was safe to depart, but at the same time enjoined her to threaten to tell me if he dared to raise his hand to strike her, and to come to me at once if she was in any danger.

The next morning, much to my satisfaction, I learned that Abe was in the cells. He had been found on the streets mad with drink about three in the morning, and instead of moving quietly along, had turned and ferociously attacked the policeman on the beat. It had taken two of them, with the assistance of some passers-by, to bring him to the Office, and even then he managed to give a deal of trouble before he relapsed into a drunken slumber.

The same forenoon a messenger appeared before me at the Office, saying—

“There’s a girl out at the Infirmary wants to see you badly. She’s quite a little thing, and was found awfully smashed in one of the condemned lands. Fell and hurt herself, I think.”

“What does she want with me?” I asked, thinking with an instinctive pang of dread of little Molly.

“I don’t know—she’s not likely to get better—internal injuries as well, and her head all cut and broken—you can hardly see a face on her.”

I sat down—I had to—I was so overcome, and I suppose the man noticed my pallor, for he said with some feeling—

“She’s not a friend, is she?”

“No, no; I have met her, that’s all,” I answered, rousing myself; “but are you sure she has not been pitched into by some one?”

“They can’t tell; she says not, and she should know best; but they found some bits of a glass bottle in the cuts on her head. She suffers a deal, but is very quiet, and just keeps on saying, ‘I would like to see M’Govan—would you let me see M’Govan, the thief-catcher, and let me hold his hand?’”

I said nothing, but as I left I could not help thinking, “How lucky we have the brute safe in the cells—it will save a deal of hunting.”

Out at the Surgical Hospital I was shown a mass of bandages, over which the chaplain had just been leaning, and was told that that was little Molly. The moment she heard me doubt the fact, she put out a trembling, groping hand, which I took in my own. She could hardly speak; but when I bent over her she eagerly whispered—

“I was afraid they’d say it was father hurt me, he gets such a bad name, and I wanted to tell you I fell and cut my head.”

"Molly, you must tell the truth now, because they say you may not get better," I said, looking down on the quivering lips and crimson bandages with moist eyes.

"They told me so, and that's why I sent for you. You won't let them take my father for it, will you? It wasn't him—mind, it wasn't him."

"Hush! Molly. Listen to me. Wasn't it the demon you spoke of that was mixed up in the whisky that did it?"

There was a slight pause, and then she said—

"I can't tell anything about it. I'm too ignorant to know these things, but I know father didn't do it. He's too fond of me. Bits of a bottle?—well, maybe I fell on a bottle, or got hurt somehow with one. They say I'm to die—will I be put in a hole in the ground? Who is God? I never saw Him. Surely He won't be hard on me, seeing I never knew Him. Will I be long of falling asleep and waking up on the other side? Love Him? I'd love anybody if they only spoke kind to me. How my rat will miss me; he'll be looking everywhere and never finding me."

I saw that she was getting hysterical and slightly delirious, and tried to soothe and quiet her, telling her to try to sleep and not think of anything but the possibility of getting well again; but voice and brain were now beyond her control, and she feverishly chattered on in the same eager strain. Now she was with her father, then with me, then in the old ruin which sheltered them, and then on the street, but never accusing any one of injuring her.

"I must go out and sing—there's a beautiful rain coming on, and snow in it" she feverishly cried, trying in vain to raise herself in bed, and then she began to sing in her poor croaking way, "Home! Home! sweet, sweet Home! Be it ever so humble, there's no place like Home!" After that she seemed to be wading among deep snow—snow that rose higher and higher on her body, that would not be beaten down, and could not be waded through or escaped. At last she seemed to give up the struggle in despair, and resignedly said—"It's awful cold, but it'll keep the wind off me. I'll sleep till father wakes."

And poor little Molly, the gutter waif, SLEPT.

When I told her father of her death, he stormed and raved that she had been killed by some one, and fiercely upbraided us with hunting out any information that was to benefit the rich, but neglecting a clear case when the sufferer was an outcast

like himself. I thought that the drink was scarcely out of his head, he looked so earnest and hot in his persistence, but assured him that I would do my best to bring the crime home to the real culprit. I did my best and failed. There was no evidence whatsoever against him, and he was discharged after a fortnight's imprisonment. To my surprise, he came straight up to the Office, and hotly demanded that we should investigate into the cause of his girl's death, and bring the murderer to justice. I looked at him steadily for some moments, and then drawing him aside, I said—

"Abe Slater, you may be putting on that look or you may not; but I may tell you that you and no other are believed to be the slayer of that poor girl. Is it true, or is it not?"

"Me? No. Would a father kill his own child?" he cried with energy; then he started and appeared to think during a long and horrified pause. "No, it couldn't have been me; she said it wasn't before she died," he muttered more to himself than to me, with a heavy perspiration oozing out on his brow. "My God! it couldn't have been me? Surely it couldn't have been me? No, no! I'm bad, I know, but I would never have done that!"

He left me and the Office thus muttering and feebly questioning himself; and it was then quite clear to me, that if he had actually caused his child's death it had been when he was insane with drink and unconscious of his own actions.

I saw him afterwards out at the No. 10 ward, reserved for cases of *del. trem.*, and his reiterated cry was to the end a feebly whispered "No, no, I won't believe it. My God! could it have been me?"

The question has never been answered, but it will be, one day, I hope.

A SILVER-PLATED BUTTON.

I WAS through at Glasgow trying to trace some valuable stolen property, and renewing acquaintance with my old friend Johnny Farrel, the detective I have mentioned in the sketch entitled "Tracking a Child Stealer,"* when the following curious case was in a manner thrust upon me. The time was in the month of November, and the first earnest of coming winter lay upon the ground in the shape of a fall of snow nearly six inches deep. It was shortly after ten o'clock at night, while, seated near a blazing red fire in the Central Office, turning over the books, with Johnny's assistance, that the principal sufferer in the case appeared to disturb our slow task and cheery talk. A stout elderly man, respectably attired, but looking dreadfully excited, was shown in by a sergeant from the "reception room" close by, with the words—

"There they are. Jist gang in an' tell them a' aboot it."

The old man removed his hat and mopped the profuse perspiration from his bald pate, at the same time bursting forth—

"Guid God, sirs, I've been robbit!—robbit on Glasca Green by a masked footpad afore ten o'clock at nicht! Which o' ye's the detective?"

"I am Johnny Farrel, and this is Mr M'Govan, the Edinburgh detective, who is here on business," answered my companion, roused by the astounding news, yet scarcely able to repress a smile at the voluble excitement and anguished despair of the old man.

"M'Govan? Edinburgh?" shortly echoed the old man. "Humph! I doot ye've broucht through some o' your Canongate keelies along wi' ye. Near a hundred pounds, and the dashed thief had the impudence to say that he wad mak' it dae, though he wished it had been mair."

"I hope you are wrong—I hope I have not brought any of

* See *Brought to Bay*, p. 300.

my 'bairns' with me," I laughingly returned; "but if I have. I assure you I am quite willing to take them back with me. Tell us how it happened, and how you came to give up the money in a public place without a struggle or an outcry."

"An outcry! dae ye think I wanted a bullet through my heid? When a robber hauds a loaded pistol close to your heid, presses it richt into your temples, as if he was trying to bore a hole to the other side wi't, ye dinna feel inclined to mak' a great noise."

"What! do you mean to say that the robber used a pistol?" I exclaimed, with an incredulous look.

"No, he didna exactly use it, or it's no likely I wad be here tellin' the tale," he answered, with that polemical sharpness peculiar to Glasgow and its folk; "but he threatened me wi't, and that was enough. My name is David Stirling, and I keep a public-house at the east end, as ye may be aware. I have some property in Dunlop Street an' King Street, and was along the nicht drawing the rents. It was rather late, an' I was in a hurry to get back to my shop in time to shut it up myself; so after walking doon to the Victoria Brig wi' a freen', I cut awa' up across the Green richt through the snaw as the shortest and quickest road hame. I was about half-way across when a man suddenly jumpit forrit, saying, 'It's a caul' nicht, freen.' I said, 'Very caul', and was for hurrying on, when he ran up to my side again, stappit a pistol to my hied, and said, 'Your money! quick!'"

"What was the man like?" I eagerly inquired. "Young or old? and how was he dressed?"

"It beats me to tell. He didna seem sae very auld, but spoke in a gruff, harsh voice to mak' believe he was ready to tak' my life. I couldna see his face, for it was covered to the mooth wi' a black mask."

"And you gave up the money at once?" I interposed, beginning to doubt the extraordinary and romantic tale, but careful to allow nothing of the impression to appear in my face.

"I did. I turned oot my pocket-book and purse, and gied him notes and silver and gold up to near a hunder pounds—a' I had on me. It'll be an awfu' loss to me—I kenna hoo I'll get owre it."

I looked at the old man in silence, curiously speculating as to whether he might not be on the eve of a comfortable bankruptcy, and anxious to account for some deficiency in the

assets. I was unjust in the suspicion, as after events proved; but the whole story was so absurd, or rather so different from the ordinary run of cases, that my distrust was at least natural. My only wonder was that he had put down his loss at less than a hundred pounds, when he might as easily have said thousands.

"And then he said that he would make the money do?" I inquiringly remarked.

"Na, he said he wanted a hunder—a hale hunder, neither mair nor less—and seemed sulky at finding that I hadna as muckle; but after a wee—feared, I s'pose, that somebody cam' that way—he pouched the siller, put up the pistol, and bade me guid nicht."

"Indeed?" I drily remarked, getting more suspicious as he proceeded. "One would think, Mr Stirling, that hundreds were much more easily earned with you than with most people when you allow them to be taken from you so easily."

"Ah, but I'm no dune yet," warmly continued the publican. "The meenit I saw the awfu' pistol put awa', I thought to mysel' that we were on even terms, and that I micht as well hae a fecht for my money. The moment he turned his back, I gied oot a great shout, and sprang on him to try and throttle him the way the garrotters dae. But he sune showed me that he was baith stronger and younger than me; for after a short struggle, in which I gripped him by the sleeve o' his coat, or ony place I could get a grup o', he ca'd me owre in the snaw, leaving me lying there wi' naething but a brass button off his coat in my hand, instead o' the siller he had taen."

"A brass button?" I exclaimed, more amazed than ever. "Brass buttons are not worn now-a-days on coats, unless by coachmen or lacqueys."

"And it was a flunky's coat he had on," continued the publican. "I min' fine o' noticing the bright buttons; and he had also a bright red cravet roon' his neck."

"Have you the button with you?" I curiously inquired, beginning to be more deeply interested.

"No me. I drapped it amon' the snaw, and got up and ran as fast as I could for a bobbie."

"Ah, that's a pity," I remarked.

"Hoo a pity? What guid wad the button hae dune?" he testily answered. "It wadna have put my money back in my pouch. wad it?"

"I am not sure of that," I calmly returned. "Less than a button has done as much before now; and you yourself admit that there is nothing else by which you could identify your assailant. Could you take us to the spot where you were attacked? I mean as near as possible to the exact spot where you were when you threw the button away?"

"Fine that, for I wasna on the walk at a', but cutting across in a straight line for the east en' o' Monteith Row."

I was a little doubtful of his ability to point out any particular spot on a trackless waste of snow, but said nothing. We lifted down our hats, and got out into the white streets, beginning to be deserted by all but the police and the houseless, and turned on to the Green just as eleven o'clock was striking. A light shower of snow was blowing across from the east, and my hope of finding the spot was rapidly evaporating, when Stirling suddenly stopped near the centre of the Green, with the words—

"It was here—the place maun be aboot here."

I brought out a dark lantern, which I had secured in the Office before starting, and began flashing it along the white ground, stooping low with my companions to discover, if possible, traces of footsteps or a struggle. After about five minutes spent in the search, we did come upon a spot where some footprints appeared to become jumbled and crossed, and near to these was still discernible the broad imprint of a stout man's form—legs, arms, trunk, and head—as neatly moulded as if he had been let down on the snow with every care and tenderness.

"That's where the deevil knockit the feet frae me," the publican tersely remarked, with the first glad start of recognition. "He jist cleekit his tae in ahint my legs and ca'd me owre, and as I had his sleeve in my fingers, I took a button frae it wi' me."

I turned to the right hand of the imprint, and with a moment or two's carefully searching and raking among the snow, at last found a bright silver-plated button, such as are worn on the livery coats of waiters or footmen. The button had come away, not through being badly sewed on, but by sewing and cloth and backing coming out in a lump. The front of the button bore the Glasgow arms, and the back the name and address of a livery tailor farther west—not much to build a case upon, certainly, but still better than nothing, and worth much as tending to confirm the truth of Stirling's ex-

traordinary story. The closest search on every side revealed no trace of money or any other article; so, taking the button with us, with its little round shred of brown cloth attached, we left the spot, and gave up the investigation for that night, as far, at least, as the curious clue was concerned.

Next morning, before going to the Office, we called upon the tailor whose name was stamped on the back of the button, and had our hope quickened by learning that he used buttons of that make for only one establishment—a fashionable hotel, which prided itself in having everything about its servants after designs of its own. Three waiters' coats had lately been turned out for this hotel, and the firm opinion of the tailor's foreman was that the button I produced belonged to one of these new coats. Thus far it appeared as if we were to have plain sailing; and Farrel, secretly disgusted, I believe, at the simplicity of the case, roundly bet me long odds that we would have the criminal in our clutches in half-an-hour. I was not so sanguine, and remained silent. Our next call, of course, was at the fashionable hotel, and when we were respectfully received at the entrance by a bowing and deferential waiter, wearing a coat of the identical shade of the scrap attached to our curious clue, with silver-plated buttons to match, it may be guessed that we both scanned the sleeves of the said waiter's coat with more than ordinary interest and eagerness, while we ingeniously held him in talk for the purpose. But our vigilance was unrewarded. No button was lacking, nor was there the slightest trace of a rent in either sleeve. A few casual inquiries, which he answered respectfully, though with growing surprise and curiosity, elicited the fact that there were other two waiters in the establishment, each wearing a coat similar to that on his back.

"And which of you—I mean, which of the three—do you remember, was it that was out last night at about ten o'clock?" I inquired, as indifferently as possible.

"Out last night, sir?" he echoed in astonishment; "there wasn't one of us out at that time—couldn't have got out on any account, sir. We had a supper in the house, and I can assure you it took us all three at it, hot and hard, to manage the waiting."

Rather disappointed, I inquired for his fellow-waiters, and with some delay was at last introduced to them both. One of them—a smart, open-faced lad—came running into the coffee-room in mute wonder; but his surprise was increased when I

deftly wrenched at his right arm, turned round the sleeve at the wrist, showed that a button had been wrenched off, taking the piece with it, and then coolly produced the missing button and shred of cloth from my own pocket, and fitted them in before his eyes. At the same moment, Farrel whipped out the little silver crowned rod forming his staff of authority, and the young fellow paled as he discovered for the first time that he was talking with detectives.

"Well, what does it all mean?" he said at last, somewhat defiantly; "and where did you get that button?"

I gravely replaced the button in my purse, and took out my note-book to jot down his replies, if any, to my questions.

"We found it where you left it last night—somewhat hurriedly, I believe, but taking a good deal more than its value with you. You need not answer my questions unless you choose. What is your name?"

"John M'Leod."

There was no shrinking or guilty blush with the prompt answer, but rather a kind of scared uneasiness, as if he were asking himself faintly what he had done, or whether it would not be better to remain doggedly silent.

"Do you mind telling us if you went out last night with this coat on, about ten o'clock?"

"I did not. I was not out all night, or all day either, as they can all testify," he hotly answered; "and I hadn't that coat on last night at all."

"You hadn't? Did you wait at the supper in your shirt sleeves?"

"No; we had black coats on. It was quite a swell affair, and everything had to be nobby and nice."

"Then who had your coat on, if you wore a black one?" I calmly pursued, fixing him rigidly with my eye, so as to read any blushing or faltering, should his words suddenly cease. He flushed slowly to the eyebrows, started slightly, as if at a sudden recollection, and then slowly answered—

"I—I would rather not say."

"Humph! I expected as much," was my short reply. "Well, get your hat."

The significant words appeared to fall on his ears like a death blow. He staggered faintly, pale to the ears, and with a glistening of grief in his eyes, faintly exclaimed—

"Why, you surely do not—do not—think I've been up to any bad games? Is there anything wrong—seriously?"

"There is—something very serious," I gravely answered; "but you need not betray yourself, unless you like."

"I have nothing to betray—nothing to conceal," he indignantly returned. "I have always borne a good character, as I can prove to you; and I hope I shall always bear one."

"I hope so," I drily responded.

"I lent the coat as a favour to an old friend last night, and got it back an hour or two later as you see it."

"What friend was it?"

"One far above any petty meanness or the thought of crime," he warmly answered; "so, if you suspect him, you may change your thoughts as soon as you please."

"Will you favour us with his name?"

"Certainly. Tom Stirling, an Edinburgh medical student."

"Whew!" I whistled right out in amazement, and then, turning to Farrel, cried, "Stirling! why, that's the same name as —. Can it be a relation? Perhaps only a madcap trick, such as students delight in?"

"Any relation to David Stirling, the publican here?" sharply inquired Farrel.

"Yes, his son; but they've quarrelled, and have separated."

"You called him an Edinburgh student," I interposed; "if he is so, how came he to be here last night?"

"I don't know, sir; I was as much surprised to see him as you can possibly be. The truth is, Tom was always very kind to me, helping me to get on. I was only potboy with them at one time; but Tom showed me how to smarten up, and get a waiter's place, and you see me now;" and the young man drew himself up with commendable pride.

"Well, proceed; you were surprised to see him. What did he say?"

"He said he wanted a loan of my coat; and, as I wasn't going to use it, I gave it, not knowing he'd be so careless as to tear a button off. Then he asked for a muffler, and I gave him one—a red worsted one, which I haven't used for years."

"He has quarrelled with his father. How does he support himself?"

"I don't know; but I'll swear he does it honestly," promptly returned M'Leod. "Oh, you needn't think he would do anything wrong. He's one of the kindest fellows breathing."

I said nothing. I had got an awkward case in hand, full of disagreeable intricacies and unpleasant tasks, and was now heartily sorry that Stirling had ever given the case into the

hands of the police; sorry that the criminal should turn out to be his own son, and doubly sorry that it was our duty to inform him of the fact. I thought—rashly, of course—that I had got to the bottom of the mystery, and by no very intricate windings or ferretings; whereas, had I known it, I was only on the threshold of the labyrinth.

“It will be the usual story—dissipated son squandering right and left the hard-won gains of his poor old father,” I thought; “and when the supplies have been cut off, turning footpad and thief, to continue the mad course.”

But first thoughts and conclusions are not always soundest, as I shall presently show. There was but one course for us—that was, however reluctantly, to take M’Leod with us, and lock him up on a charge of complicity, and then inform the publican of the painful discovery we had made. I visited him at his place of business, and with much hesitation laid the facts before him. I had expected a start of horror, and perhaps a wail of despair, at the frightful predicament of being forced to prosecute his own son; but, though he appeared startled enough, his feeling appeared to be more one of concentrated fury and passion than of grief.

“The blasted renegade! to turn on his ain faither, and rob him like a stranger,” he exclaimed. “He’ll maybe think that I’ll not let the law tak’ its course—”

“That is scarcely in your power now; but I was about to suggest that, when he is brought up, you might absent yourself, and thus perhaps have the lad set at liberty. Even that course might fail to save him; but—”

“But I’m no gaun to try it,” he sharply returned. “You gang through and catch him, and pit him in Duke Street as sune as you like. I’m ready for him, the deevil! A hale hunder pounds. I hope they’ll gie him a year for each pound.”

“You wish him to be punished, then?”

“Punished? Ay! and what’s mair, if I had only thought it was him, I wud have punished him weel at the time. The scoondrel! I wish I had beetled the life oot o’ him.”

This was enough for me; and the same afternoon, after making a few inquiries, I took train for Edinburgh, in company with Farrel, with the intention of trapping the robber in the full zenith of success. I expected to find him in some flashy lodging, or strutting the streets, and parading the public-house bars in full feather, scattering the stolen money in handfuls, as became a dashing medical student. It was with something

like surprise, therefore, that I found him lodged in a miserable garret in College Street—a closet would be a fitter word—which could not have cost him above a couple of shillings a-week. The rather untidy landlady said “Yes, he was in—at his dinner. Would we gang in, or would she take in oor names?”

We decided to “gang in,” and were shown into the low-roofed den, to find him hard at work with a book in one hand, and a potato in the other. This dinner of the medical student was, as he himself expressed it, “a sodger” (red herring), and some five or six potatoes! I stared and stared, wondering where the stolen hundred pounds had gone, or how he came to be so frugal as not to use it, after risking so much to get it; and then, noting my puzzled expression, he cheerily remarked—

“Welcome, gentlemen, to my study, parlour, bedroom, and dining-room; small perhaps, but very convenient; everything within arm’s length wherever you choose to seat yourself. No matter, I am working for a better. May I inquire?” and his look changed a little as I took out my staff.

“You may; we have just come from Glasgow to arrest you on a charge of robbing your father.”

“Hem—that’s awkward, as it will interfere with my studies,” he meditatively remarked, after coolly tapping his forehead in dubiety, and without showing the slightest concern or alarm. “You couldn’t put it off for a week, I suppose?”

“Scarcely;” and I smiled slightly, wondering if he were not mad.

“My respected parent, I suppose, knows that I was the one who relieved him of the superfluous money?” he inquiringly pursued.

“He does, and insists on pressing the charge,” I quietly answered, more and more surprised at his cool and smiling demeanour.

“Ah, just so; I’m sorry for him—very sorry. Well, I suppose we may go at once.”

“One moment. It will be necessary to search the room.”

“For the money, I suppose?” he lightly returned. “Now, look you, am I like a man who has a hundred pounds lying about me? No; you may save yourself the trouble, and me the annoyance of having my books and papers disturbed. The money is not here.”

“You are wonderfully frank. Have you any objection to say where you have put it?”

"I have put it—well, we'll say where it should have been long before I touched it. Will that satisfy you?"

"For want of a better. Beggars must not be choosers," I lightly returned, taking care, however, to search thoroughly the whole place, and to repeat the process upon himself, when we reached the Central Office in High Street, whither we conveyed him before starting for Glasgow.

Now, as far as the case had gone, there were in it strange elements of mystery—incidents quite inexplicable by ordinary reasoning.

A young man might rob his father, and even take a special journey to accomplish the crime; but how did it happen that he was still in poverty, though only a day had intervened? I made many conjectures, and futile searches, and inquiries, but so far at sea were they all that they need find no place here. But a day or two after, when an outline of the curious facts had found its way into the newspapers, a new light was thrown on the affair by a young woman and her husband, named Maggie and William Syme, calling at the Central Office, and expressing a wish to see the prisoner. This request being refused, the young wife—she was a mere girl, and uncommonly pretty—said she could explain all about the robbery, so as to clear Tom Stirling entirely. We were brought in to listen to her story, and a curious story it was.

"I am an orphan, and I was brought up from a child by Mr Stirling," she began in a tearful, but at the same time very engaging way. "Tom and I have always been like brother and sister, but when we became man and woman, Tom's father took the notion of having us married, knowing that though I had not a shilling of my own, I am not without expectations from a distant relative, who, though he never holds intercourse with me, has no other heir. Tom struck out against the arrangement, saying roundly that he didn't care for me in that way, and also pointing out that I was already engaged to Mr Syme here;" and she blushed a little as she indicated her husband. "Well, we had rather an unhappy time of it, till at last I left and got married, when Mr Stirling turned round like a fiend on his son Tom, called him everything for his foolishness in not carrying me off instead of a nobody, as he called my husband, and finally turned him out of the house, and told him to shift for himself. But Tom had a deal of push in him, and many friends, so he continued to work his way at college, and never came to Glasgow but he seemed overflowing with

money and good nature. Last summer, my husband, who is in business in Partick, put his name to a bill for a friend who has recently absconded, and the want of the hundred pounds, coming so unexpectedly, and at such a time, nearly drove us mad. We didn't know where to turn, and ruin seemed sure, till I thought of Tom, and wrote him a long letter, explaining all I needed—the loan of a hundred pounds till we should find our feet again, and asking if any of his friends could get us the money. I wrote the letter, but did not post it, as it struck me I could say it better than write it; and I went through and saw him at the college gate, where he looked rather doubtful for a time, and scratched his head, as if not sure what to do. But after a minute he looked brighter and said, 'Oh, I have it—the day after to-morrow is rent-day—yes, I can get it for you, Maggie; borrow it from a friend who has more than he ought to have, or can use. Expect me with the money the day after to-morrow.' Well, I was so grateful that I kissed him on the street there and then—oh, you needn't smile to my husband, for he's not jealous of Tom—and came home with a light heart. Punctual as the day came round, Tom appeared, gave us the money, and left in high spirits. Oh, little did I think what he had done to get it, or I would have been the last to take it;" and a flow of tears confirmed her impulsive statement.

We were now in a worse plight than before, for of course we had to detain both the young wife and her husband on a charge of abetting the crime. But a greater surprise was to come. The next day, when they were brought up for examination, and Tom Stirling saw who the two prisoners were, he turned to the Sheriff, and with more excitement and wrath than he had yet displayed, demanded to make a statement in presence of his father, the accuser.

"I have remained silent in hope that you would think better of it," he sternly began, facing his parent with no loving glance. "You know that I took the money from you, and you know for whom I took it, yet there you stand as cruel and determined as though we were the criminals and you the saintly innocent. I beg to inform this Court that the money I took from my father, with another hundred behind it, belongs to this poor girl at my side—ay, wholly and solely to Maggie Syme. Rather more than a year before she married, a friend left her the money in trust of my father; but he enjoined me not to mention the fact to her, saying, 'Ye ken, Tom, it'll be yours by and by.' When the rupture came, he said, 'I'll never tell

the ungrateful hussy about the twa hunder pound. What she doesna ken 'll dae her nae herm.' I protested against the robbery, but in vain; and as I was unwilling to expose my father and have him charged with the embezzlement, I allowed the matter to rest, merely resolving to pay the money into her hands out of my own pocket as soon as I should take my diploma and save as much. If I have spoken a word that is not true, may God judge me accordingly. There stands the real criminal; and if my word is insufficient, perhaps his own crimson and tell-tale face will be better evidence against him!"

All eyes were turned upon the guilty publican, who was shrinking rapidly towards the door, when he was sharply ordered back by the Sheriff, and so searchingly examined and forced to make such confirmatory admissions, that in a short time the Fiscal rose and requested permission to abandon the charge against all three, at the same time recommending Mrs Syme to proceed against Stirling for the appropriation of her money.

But the joyful released prisoners were of a different nature from the accuser, and the charge never saw the light. Tom Stirling received his diploma shortly after, and was started in practice in grand style, with carriage and all complete, by his subdued and repentant father.

BONNIE BELL, THE MACHINIST.

I HAD been called up to a big tailoring establishment on the Bridge, to investigate a peculiar case of pilfering, when I first met and spoke to Bonnie Bell, as she was called. The case had no connection with her, or she with it—one or two of the men had merely used an innocent boy as a cat's-paw, by sending him down to the front shop for sewing twist, trimmings, and even pieces of velvet and silk, which went into their own pockets instead of their work; but Bell's fresh face and rosy cheeks were such a contrast to the sickly and wearied faces in the work-room in which several sewing machines were rattling away, and she was so beautiful withal, that I was drawn towards her, just as one might be drawn to admire a beautiful flower unexpectedly lighted upon in a desert. Yet it was not the beauty alone which attracted one to the face. There are many as sweet faced as Bonnie Bell, whose appearance at once calls forth the thought, "She is beautiful; but she is quite able to look after herself." Bonnie Bell gave one the idea of a clinging simplicity and an artless fondness which needed a manly and protecting hand to guard her through evil and good report.

I was not surprised, then, to learn, a few days later, when I met her on the street away from the birring noise of the sewing machines, that she was fresh from the country. She spoke of her home—in a little hamlet near Norman's Law in Fife—with brimming eyes and a heart yearning for its quiet joys. The hamlet, she said, was a mere row of cottages, cradled in the hills, and miles from any railway; and the inhabitants were mere farm hinds or weavers; but her father's place was like a little paradise. The cottage was only a low-roofed "but and ben;" but in front was a long slope of garden ground, filled with flowers in rich masses and a wild profusion that would have sent a professional gardener into hysterics. Roses crept up and covered the white walls; beds of dark wallflower skirted these, mingling its sweet scent with the intoxicating perfume of sweet peas and dark violets. At the foot of the garden a lilac

and a laburnum tree joined their branches and mingled their bright blossoms over a rustic seat, on which Bell's father often sat and read aloud to his children on the soft summer evenings, with his children at his feet, and perhaps a neighbour or two leaning over the low fence to share the pleasure; and strangers passing the spot at rare intervals to climb Norman's Law, and catching sight of the masses of violets, crimson daisies, golden thyme, and sweet balm, never failed to pause with exclamations of surprise and delight.

And the peacefulness and beauty of the outside of the cottage were but a reflex of what reigned within. If their pleasures were simple, they were also unalloyed; and Bonnie Bell, after a long day at her loom, would retire to a white-washed den above the kitchen and workroom—a mere cranny of a place, with one pane of glass set into the tiles for a window, thinking it a perfect palace of peace and comfort, and sleep with a calm blissfulness which few dwellers in palaces know.

All this continued till Bell went to visit a friend in Edinburgh, and then she went back to find everything dwindled in size, and only insignificance where all had been grandeur and beauty. And then money was so much more easily made in town. She had to slave from early morn till late at night at her loom to make five or six shillings in a week—to say nothing of many days when there was no web in the loom to work at; in the town she had met a girl who, by working a sewing machine, could earn ten, fifteen, or even twenty shillings a week. The picture was a perfect vista of wealth and happiness—too tempting to be resisted—and Bell, who was naturally neat-handed, nimble, and clever, resolved to go to Edinburgh. Much of the gilt which made the picture so dazzling had been rubbed away since then. She found that if she made more money, it took more to support her; and already the constant treadling of the machine was beginning to tell upon her back, in which she never before felt a pain which a night's rest would not cure; but she liked Edinburgh, and was resolved never to go back to the country.

"She will lose the roses on her cheeks soon," was my mental comment as I parted with her when our ways diverged. "I hope she will get a good husband. It would be a pity for such an artless nature to have the dream dispelled."

Not long after this I met one of Bonnie Bell's shop companions, and learned with some surprise that she was married.

"Has she got a good match?" was my quick inquiry, for I

had begun to take quite an interest in the simple country girl, though never dreaming of her having to pass through my hands.

"No—a lazy drunken brute of a tailor, that nobody would have picked up if they had seen him fall and break his leg. I wonder, and everybody else, what she saw in him."

I was sorry to hear it, and said so.

"She's back to work again in another shop," continued the girl with energy. "He'll not work a stitch, so she must do it or starve. Isn't it a shame? I believe it's her that keeps him."

For a good many weeks after hearing this, I kept a look-out for Bell on the Bridges, when I chanced to go along them at meal hours; but I never met her, and gradually forgot her story. About a year after, I was called to investigate another case of pilfering in a tailor's shop, and in visiting the place entered a little den behind the tailor's workshop in which two machinists were working away as for life and death.

The robberies in this case were serious, and had been continued for months, till goods to the value of £60 or £70 had been abstracted. I had no clue whatever to work upon, except the firm assertion of the proprietors that the thief must be one of the workers.

In entering the girls' room, which was partitioned off from the tailor's place, and had a little sliding panel in the wall for thrusting through work, I seemed to surprise them; and one haggard-faced girl, though pallid enough at best, became swiftly whiter as her eyes fell upon my face. It was that scared look of palpitation and dread which is familiar to me as the fall of night, and which so often betrays the guilty in spite of showers of protestations.

My swift thought was the query—

"Surely it is not one of the girls that is the thief?"

I had started this thought, and was gazing curiously into the haggard and still beautiful features of the young woman for some seconds before any recognition came. Then I slowly broke the awkward silence by saying—

"Surely I should know your face?"

She smiled faintly, though with a lingering trace of the scared look, and said—

"Oh, yes; you spoke to me once when I was in M——s. That was before I was married."

"And you are Bonnie Bell?" I answered, with little vivacity, for the change on her was too sad to be passed over.

"Yes; I used to be called that," she said, with a sharply stifled sigh and a weary pressure of her hand on her side, "before I was married."

I ought to have been thinking most of her vanished beauty and freshness, for in one year she was so altered that but for her surroundings and her smile I should never have known her; but the truth is I was thinking of that scared and expectant look with which she recognised me. It is an expression which has but one meaning to me; but that interpretation was the very one I was most loath to make in her case. I had taken a liking to her, and could not allow myself to think *her* guilty.

"Have you any family?" I asked, to fill up the painful pause while she bent over her work to tie some ends.

"Yes, one—I get a woman to look after it while I'm here," she said, with a slight flush tinging her cheek.

In mercy I forebore questioning her further; indeed, I could not have said more without alluding to her husband, and that, I feared, would be a painful subject to her. I therefore passed on through a side door to examine the room from which the pilfered goods had been taken; and after completing my work there, was still haunted by the idea that Bonnie Bell at least knew something of the thief. A single look had done it all, and that was no sound evidence; but the idea stuck to me in spite of my efforts to throw it off; and when the master said to me—

"Well, Mr M'Govan, do you suspect any one?" I started out of my cogitations as guiltily as if I had been the thief, and answered, with some confusion—

"I am not quite sure. It surely could not be one of your machinists?"

His eyes brightened at once, and I saw at once that our suspicions coincided.

"You suspect one of them," he said, promptly; "which is it?"

"It could not be the little one," I evasively returned; "she is too stupid-like for such a bold thing."

"Exactly my thought," he responded, "and, like me, you suspect Bella Simpson, the other machinist. I am sorry for the poor thing, even if it should turn out to be she who has done it. She has a drunken beast of a husband, who works about a day in every month, and if she has robbed me, you may depend he has set her on to it."

"He never comes about the shop himself, does he?"

"No, I wouldn't allow the wretch within my door."

"Are the stolen things articles which he could readily use or find a market for?"

"Oh, just that—trimmings, silk, cloth, velvet. But I don't see how that woman could have taken so much without the help of some of the shopmen. You see they have charge of the things, and give everything out that is used. She might have taken one or two things without their knowledge, but not so much as sixty or seventy pounds worth."

I got Bonnie Bell's address from him, and then got him to go down with me to the place. The house was a single room in a nasty entry off the Potterrow. There was no one in when we knocked; but when we tried the door and found it unfastened, we entered the wretched place, where we were speedily joined by an old woman from the next house. Simpson was out, she said, but she was there to look after the house and bairn, and would answer any questions. Yes; she thought he had been sewing some before he went out, and if we wanted him particularly she thought she might find him at the public-house further along, drinking or playing dominoes with the hatters, who were the chief patrons of the place. We did not want him particularly; but my companion began looking over some things in the window place, at which Simpson on rare occasions worked, and there he found a man's frock coat, which had evidently been turned, and was being decorated on the coat-collar with a facing of black silk.

"It's very like some of the silk I've missed," said my companion, after a long look at the facing; and, sure enough, when he searched about, he found the cuttings from the facing, on which was a coloured edging which exactly corresponded with that on the web in the warehouse which I had examined.

Still, this was not indubitable proof that the silk had been stolen, as many webs might have the same edging. But on searching about the room, the master tailor discovered several other articles, which he declared could have been taken from no shop but his, including a box of trouser buttons bearing on them a stamped impression of his name and address. Altogether, I thought we found enough to justify me in questioning Mr Simpson a little, and we accordingly went along to the public-house, and found him glossy and exuberant, with his goggle eyes almost jumping from his head, among a group of hatters at the counter, and just in the act of burying his nose

in a foaming pint stoup of ale, to which some of them had treated him.

As I went up to him with the brief words, "Your name is Simpson?" his drunken smile faded, and the pot was put down untasted.

"Yes, sir, my name *is* Simpson," he said with drunken dignity. "What do you want with me?"

"Only to know where you got some silk and trimmings and trouser buttons we've just found up at your house. The buttons bear this gentleman's name and address. My name is M'Govan, so you will understand that I've a right to ask."

The bloated face became more and more blank and ghastly, and the pot trembled so much in his hand that he decided to put it down on the pewter-covered counter.

"Silk trimmings?" he echoed, trying to assume a grave and thoughtful look. "You don't mean to say there's anything wrong with them? My wife bought them for me with good hard cash in a shop in Niddry Street. All fair and square, I assure you."

He had quite a glib account to give of the whole transaction so far as he was concerned; and it was evident to me that, whatever he lacked, he had at least the gift of the gab. Nevertheless I took him with me—after he had carefully finished his pot of ale—and then, after I had seen him as far as the Police Office, I went back to the Potterrow to get the stolen things, and also Bonnie Bell.

I was there before her, and had to wait half-an-hour till she appeared—wearied and worn from her day's work.

The first glance into my face as she entered the wretched room told her all, and she instantly dropped into a seat, and feebly wrung her hands.

"I've got the things," I said huskily, for I felt for the poor girl, "and you need not say anything about them unless you like, for it will all be turned against you. Would you like to eat anything before we go?"

"Eat!" she echoed with an anguished look. "I couldna eat. It would choke me. But you'll surely let me kiss my bairn? Oh, will I hae to dae without my bairn a' that time?"

"Perhaps you will not be long away," I cheerfully answered. "I don't think they will be hard on *you*."

She stared at me with a puzzled expression, and then wearily said—

"They canna be hard on onybody else, for it was me that

did it. I never thought there was much harm in taking a few buttons and a wee bit silk. I'm sorry for it now, and would never do the like again, but it's owre late, owre late!"

Her tears came freely; and when she got her atomy of a child in her arms from the old woman who looked after it by day, I thought I should never get them parted.

"It'll maybe be deid afore I come oot again," she hysterically exclaimed as I forcibly led her down the stair. "He'll never look after it like its mither. Eh, if I could only wake up in my faither's hoose, and find it a' a dream!"

A curious fact, which I have noticed in many cases, was that Bonnie Bell, though she had rubbed off much of her homely Doric in Edinburgh, got it all back the moment she was powerfully agitated.

She sobbed most of the way to the Office, and in going up the close whispered suddenly to me—

"I ken I'll be put in jail for it, but oh, could you no try and keep the story oot o' the Fife papers? My faither reads them every Saturday nicht; and though they've never forgien me since I married him, it would kill them to read o' my disgrace."

I promised to do my best, and really did speak to the only reporter I noticed in Court next day, but the case did get into the papers notwithstanding. Bonnie Bell of course did not know of it then, for she was sent to prison for thirty days, while her husband was discharged, and went back to his drinking and dominoes, to kill the time till she should be free.

After this I saw little of Bonnie Bell for two years. She had lost her place, of course; but her husband could not starve, so she had to get work from a slop-shop, and slave all her waking hours to keep them in life. One day I was passing along Richmond Street, when a young woman passed me in tears, bearing a child wrapped in a shawl in her arms. She knew me, though I had forgotten her, and she slackened her pace to say—

"Oh, Mr M'Govan, my bairn's awfu' ill, and I'm taking it round to the Dispensary. Doesn't it look awfu' queer?"

And then I recognised Bonnie Bell. I held back the shawl for a moment to look into the pinched and pallid little face; and my heart gave a pang as I noted the expression of the eyes and the dewy dampness of the temples.

"It is not well," I guardedly answered. "You had better get there as soon as possible. See, I will go round with you, and get them to attend to you first."

A shower of husky blessings rewarded me ; but when we got to the place the doctors only exchanged significant glances, and gravely told the poor mother that they could do nothing for the child. She could not believe it ; but even while she spoke the last change crept over the infant's face, and in a moment or two her second born was lying dead in her arms. The doctors had some learned name for the trouble which had caused its death ; but it needed only a glance at the poor mother's wretched clothing and pinched features, to tell that poverty had been an important ally of disease.

Poor Bell was in a dreadful state, and had to be taken home in a cab ; and then there was a poorhouse funeral, and her life flowed on much as before. She had still her first child, now a quick little thing of three years ; and as Simpson at times took a working fit, and helped her with the slop work at which she slaved, there were slight gleams of sunshine even in her obscure existence. One week her husband slaved with her every day, but then he made up for it by taking a burst of drinking which lasted till the Tuesday, and consumed a great deal more than he had earned. He went home then for more money, and as there was none to get he became frightfully quarrelsome. At last he took up a heavy board to fling at the woman who was toiling for him ; and the little girl, who had run in, as children will do, with the idea of protecting her mother, was struck with the hard missile on the back of the head. The child, after the first burst of crying, did not seem to be much hurt ; but next morning it did not get up promptly, as was its wont, saying feebly—

"I'm goin' 'peep again, mammy ; heady sair—heady sair, mammy."

Lotions of vinegar and whisky produced no impression on the swelling, and before the day was over, the little thing startled her mother by saying—

"No get better mammy—be shut in a box the morn."

Poor Bell sat up the long night through sewing as for dear life, and soothing the child at intervals by carrying her about the room ; but Simpson was roused before morning by a dreadful commotion in the room, and blinkingly saw a neighbour trying to cover the dead child from its distracted mother's sight.

A whisper of this affair somehow reached the Office, and the medical inspection of the child's body was such that I went after Simpson at once, and with great zest.

There was no evidence, of course, that he had been the injurer of the child, or, indeed, that it had not merely fallen and fractured its own skull, but there was a firm impression that he was the guilty one; and while I was away getting Simpson, in a half-fuddled condition, in his favourite public-house, another went along to question Bonnie Bell sharply as to the cause of her child's illness and death.

Poor Bell was not in a fit state to be troubled much, or it is not unlikely she would have been arrested too, and in her terror and half-crazed condition, she firmly declared that the child had never been struck on the head, but had simply been weakly, and died a natural death. As soon as she was left alone, however, she went to a neighbour and learned that her husband had been taken away to the Head Office by M'Govan, and she at once took alarm.

"He will come to me next, and question me till he gets me to swear away my man's life," she said; and then she got back to her own room, quite sure that her husband would be hanged for the crime, and as sure that he would escape if she only kept out of my way.

"I wad like to have seen my bairn happit in the grund," she feverishly thought; "but I maun get away frae here."

Away, but whither? She knew of no hiding-place, and it was more by instinct than reason that she turned her face in the direction of the hills of Fife—that instinct which prompts a wounded hare to make for its familiar form, or a bleeding bird to flutter towards its nest. Home! early home—there would be the sea between us; and away in a quiet hamlet, cradled in the hills, and far from any railway station: no detective, she thought, would ever look for her there. Bell kissed her dead child and glided out of the house, and in a few minutes was speeding towards Granton on foot. She paid her passage across to Burntisland, and then resumed her journey on foot. She had a shilling or two in her pocket, but was so much afraid of being seen or traced, that she avoided every house and spent the night in the open air. I am not sure if she ever thought of eating, but almost the only trace I got of her was when she was within six miles of her home. She had sat down in sheer exhaustion opposite a cottage door; and the woman of the house, noticing her woe-begone look and marble face, brought out and offered her a cup of milk. Bell drank the milk mechanically, and then the woman looked round, and ventured to say, inquiringly—

"You have nae bairns?"

"No, no—nae bairns," said Bonnie Bell, with a shivering sigh. "My airms are empty now."

"Puir thing, and are ye gaun far?" feelingly continued the woman.

"Hame—hame—hame," faintly answered Bell. "I'm weary—weary—weary o' the warld. I wish I was at the end o' the road."

So she moved off, and in three or four hours was slowly climbing the steep path to her home. When she at last caught sight of the gay garden in front of the white row of cottages, the sun was setting redly behind Norman's Law, and in the doorway she saw her mother, grown more withered and grey, standing shading her eyes with her hand as she looked down at the stranger climbing the path. Bell went straight to the garden wicket, and walked slowly up to her mother, but was not recognised.

"Well, my wuman, what dae ye want?" said the old woman.

"Oh, mither, mither! dae ye no ken me? I'm Bell, come back—and, oh, I wish I ne'er had gaen awa'!"

A storm of bitter reproaches would have been her greeting, but as Bell uttered the weary cry, she sank softly on her knees at the threshold, and when her father, who had heard the cry and recognised the voice, ran out to raise her, he found that she had fainted. They bore her into the house and tucked her in her mother's bed; but when she recovered consciousness she was in a high fever, and would not let her father leave her side.

"Haud my hand, faither," she always said. "Haud it firm, for I feel as if I was slippin' awa'."

When at last she fell into a troubled sleep, her father went a five-mile walk to the nearest doctor, and brought him back with him. The doctor apprehended nothing serious, but, of course, he could have no idea of all that Bonnie Bell had suffered. The next day, about the time when the doctor was to have called, I turned into the path winding up towards the cottages. I had got out at Cupar, and walked the rest of the distance, feeling so sure that I should find Bell at home, that the incident of the cup of milk, when I learned it, neither surprised nor elated me.

Just as I appeared in sight, Bell's condition had become so alarming that the old man was at the door eagerly on the outlook for the doctor.

"There he is at last," he cried, on sighting my figure. "No, it's no him either—it's a stranger."

Bonnie Bell faintly raised her hand, saying in sudden terror—

"It's M'Govan—I'm sure it'll be M'Govan, the detective. Oh, hide me, mither! Say I'm no here;" then her strength gave way, and she sank back weakly in her mother's arms.

I asked no questions at any of the cottages. I picked out the only beautiful and blooming garden in the row, and went at once to the door.

I was so long of getting an answer to my knock, although I heard voices within, that at last I raised the latch and looked in. The old man was prostrate on the bed, and the mother, with streaming eyes, was bending over Bonnie Bell, and gently closing the drooping eyelids. I moved in unquestioned, with head uncovered in reverence and awe, and, I am not ashamed to say, tears springing to my own eyes as I looked down on the marble features of the dead girl, with all the careworn lines slowly vanishing from them, and something like her early sweetness and beauty dawning upon the still face. The intoxicating fragrance of summer flowers floated in at the open window; but Bonnie Bell had gone where flowers are in everlasting bloom, and where tiny arms, eagerly outstretched, waited to cradle her weary head in endless peace.

I said nothing of my mission; did not even leave my name; but left them with their sorrow, and returned the way I had come.

Simpson eventually, when told of his wife's death, confessed all I have put down, and was sentenced to four months' imprisonment for manslaughter. He wept like a child when I told him of Bonnie Bell's last hours, and I put down his tears as the mere maudlin whinings of a drunkard, which would be forgotten, on his release, at the first sight of a public-house, but in this I was mistaken. On his release he became a strong temperance man, both sober and diligent. He is in England now, and doing well, I believe; and once he said to me when I met him, "It needed Bell to be taken from me to wake me from my sin." I could only sigh, and wish that the change had come sooner.

SPIRIT RAPPERS.

I HAPPENED to be in Glasgow when the chief sufferer in the following case called at the Office, and the lady accordingly was referred to M'Sweeny, with her account of the mysterious robbery which had brought her there. My chum, ever eager to distinguish himself in my absence, obeyed the summons with the utmost alacrity, but became slightly damped in enthusiasm whenever the suspected thieves were indicated. The lady, whom I may name Mrs M'Ilwraith, had volubly and excitedly begun to describe how she had had a diamond locket and gold necklet stolen—the whole having cost her £20 only a few weeks before—and then, when M'Sweeny inquired if she suspected any one of the theft, nearly made his hair stand on end by saying, with the utmost gravity—

“I don't know any one who could have taken it. It must have been the spirits.”

“The—the wh—at?” stammered M'Sweeny, with a look of dismay.

“The spirits,” calmly repeated the lady. “My husband is a spiritualist, and we have been perfectly pestered with them ever since he made the discovery that he is a medium.”

“And what's a medium?” asked M'Sweeny, with lengthened visage.

“It's one who is under the immediate control of spirits.”

“Drunk, ye mane?” hopefully suggested M'Sweeny.

“No, no—in direct communication with the spirits of the dead,” said the lady, impatiently.

M'Sweeny started up as nimbly as if he had been touched with the brass handles of an electric machine.

“Hush! missis—don't spake of them,” he breathed in horrified tones. “It's ghosts ye mane. Ye shouldn't have come to me wid this case. I'm not the man for ghosts; ye should have gone to Jamie M'Govan, or waited till he came back from Glasgow. It's not my line, for betwixt the both of us, *I belave in them meself.*”

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady, rather staggered, "and do you think they would actually bear off and keep a gold locket set with diamonds, and the necklet attached?"

"There's no botheration and mischief that they won't try," said M'Sweeny, reservedly, "but I never heard of them envying any wan of their jewellery."

"My husband tells me that they can lift a piano weighing ten hundredweight, and carry it upstairs easier than seven men could carry it down," pursued the lady, half-convinced.

"But did they steal the piano?" inquiringly continued M'Sweeny.

"No—not that I'm aware of. You see, they've the run of all the pianos in the world, and can play them without even lifting the lids, so they have no incentive to stealing one."

"That's me own thought exactly," said M'Sweeny, gathering courage. "Ghosts, or spirits, or whatever ye like to call them, is generally honest. They may *give* ye something, if it's only a pug in the ribs in the dark, or a carry through the clouds by the hair of the head while ye're asleep, but they don't steal. But what did your husband think of it?"

"That is the awkward thing," said the lady, flushing a little. "I dare not speak of it to him, because I bought the necklet with money which he gave me for very different purposes—charities, missions, and so forth. That's why I hesitated so long about informing the police of the robbery. Mrs Anson, a gifted lady medium, who has been staying with us for a few months, and who is sometimes controlled by the spirit of an African, tells me it has been taken by him as a rebuke to me for my dishonesty to his countrymen in buying it."

"Oh, indeed!" said M'Sweeny, with fresh interest; "and was this lady with ye when the thing was stolen?"

"Oh, yes, she is with us still. One day last week she was suddenly controlled—that is, she fell into a trance—and very soon this tormenting negro spoke through her, and said something about jewellery, with a great deal of chuckling and laughing, which I couldn't understand at the time; and the same night, when I went to the drawer in which I had the trinket locked, it was gone."

"Did anybody know it was kept there?" said M'Sweeny, again becoming awed.

"Not a living soul—not even Mrs Anson. She knew I had bought it, and what it cost me, but beyond that nothing. I was very careful to put it where no one could get at it. The

drawer was locked, and the jewel-case in which it lay was also locked. I found them locked, and not an article disturbed, but the locket and chain were gone. The marvellous thing is that my keys are never out of my possession, and the lock on that particular drawer is a Chubb, which I had specially fitted on for security, and could not be picked or opened with any but its own key."

"Then you don't think that some rogue of a spirit—them kind that gives us plenty of work and fills all the jails—had whispered to this Mrs Anson to slip the thing into her own pocket?"

"Oh, ridiculous! never!" was the emphatic reply. "Mrs Anson is a lady, and has more jewellery of her own, all received in presents, than she has any need for—for she is so simple-minded and ignorant that she hardly understands what jewellery means, and seldom puts it on."

"She will be rich, I suppose?—have a power of money of her own?" inquiringly pursued M'Sweeny.

"Well, not a great deal. Her husband, I understand, had such a violent temper that they could not agree, and he treated her rather stingily when they separated; but she is a dear creature, and has so many friends that she need never want."

"You said you were pestered by the spirits?" said M'Sweeny, at last, becoming thoroughly mystified. "Have they played any other tricks on ye? or what did they do to pester you?"

"Always rap-rapping—mostly in the night-time, and worst in the wine-cellar. Mr M'Ilwraith only discovered that by accident when he chanced to go down to the cellar at a late hour one night, and found a perfect hurricane of knocks going on—all over the roof, and floor, and walls. Some nights it was worse than others; and it was only after he learned to read the knocks that he understood what it meant. Mrs Anson explained how a certain number of knocks meant a certain word, and then the rest was easy."

"But they didn't do no mischief?" inquiringly pursued M'Sweeny.

"Oh, yes, at times they did. Sometimes they would rap at the windows till the glass broke—we've had about a dozen large panes to replace; I've seen one smashed right in before my eyes, as if a stone had been dashed at it, yet when I looked out not a living soul was in sight, though I could see such a distance across the garden and fields as to make it impossible for any one to escape without being detected. And what was

still more strange—no stone ever entered at the broken window. It was simply smashed in by an invisible hand, without a living being in sight but myself.”

“Did your friend, Mrs Anson, see the windows broke in?”

“No; her presence seemed to act as a charm for their protection. She generally came running down-stairs from her own room whenever she heard the smash occur, so there could not be the slightest suspicion of her being the mysterious breaker.”

M'Sweeny was thoroughly puzzled, and, I suspect, began to have mingled with the feeling a wholesome dread that the spirits, the moment he personally appeared on the scene to investigate, would turn their benevolent attentions to him. Mysterious beings who could lift pianos like mere feather weights, and smash windows, and spirit away diamonds and gold out of double-locked recesses, and go rapping along walls, and roofs, and floors of cellars, till the whole seemed ready to totter and collapse, were not what he could call comfortable companions. He continued to question Mrs M'Ilwraith till he was sick of the whole case, but the more he questioned the greater grew his terror. Mrs M'Ilwraith was not exactly a believer in spirits, else she would never have put aside the advice of Mrs Anson and consulted us; but she had suffered enough from the mysterious tricks attributed to these roguish beings to make her half a convert. She candidly confessed that she would have been happier without their kind attentions, and that she would have much preferred the African to allow her to be sole judge of her own actions in buying and wearing the missing jewel; but there were the facts, and what could be made of them? M'Sweeny, it is true, made a great show of courage and indignation at the breaking of the windows, and said it was clearly an infringement of the law, and must be put a stop to at once; but in his heart I am certain he quaked as abjectly as a child cowering before its own shadow. Accordingly, he made arrangements at once to go out to the scene of the rappings—a great semi-detached villa at the Grange—one of those colossal modern buildings which one would have expected to be the least likely in the world to be troubled with perturbed spirits. If it had been an old building, as he afterwards remarked to me, with a horrible tradition of a comfortable gory murder or suicide attached to it, he could have understood it all; but with a mere building got up to sell—a shoddy affair of sand and bricks, with a thin skin of showily polished

stones—the experience was new. A detective, however, has no choice—he must go where glory waits him; and M'Sweeny arranged to visit Mrs M'Ilwraith's villa that day.

In the afternoon, accordingly, he walked out to the Grange, and easily found the great house, the back windows of which at the time looked towards Blackford Hill without interruption of any kind.

It was a showy place, having a coach-house attached, and a big garden and green behind, separated from that of the next house by a high paling of wood. When M'Sweeny arrived, the master of the house was not there, but he was introduced to the medium, Mrs Anson, who did not receive him very graciously, and held a long conversation in a remonstrative whisper with Mrs M'Ilwraith, evidently on the impropriety of calling him in. Mrs Anson appeared to be more mistress of the house than the lady who entertained her, and was a good-looking, neatly-dressed, and apparently accomplished woman as well.

She took M'Sweeny in hand herself, and soon had him in a beautiful condition of terror and superstition, telling him tale after tale of the astounding feats of the spirits with herself—one of which was nothing less than that of carrying her up through two storeys of ceilings to a garret far above, without leaving as much as a pin-hole in her wake. A friend of hers had been carried by the spirits several miles, on a wet, rainy night, from one house to another without so much as feeling a drop of rain or a puff of wind—certainly a great improvement in quickness and comfort, to say nothing of cheapness, upon the commonplace cab or tramway car. Altogether Mrs Anson impressed M'Sweeny with the idea that she was a wonderful woman, and I have no doubt would have sent him away much more mystified than when he went out, had it not chanced that while they were conversing the master of the house arrived. The moment his step and voice were heard in the hall, Mrs Anson and the lady of the house exchanged glances of concern; but before they could arrange any explanation, Mr M'Ilwraith entered the room. Then the mistress of the house, smiling sweetly, advanced towards her husband, introducing M'Sweeny with the words—

“This is an old friend of mine—Mr M'Sweeny—an inquirer anxious to investigate, and if possible see something of, the doings of the spirits in our house.”

M'Sweeny favoured her with a woful glance of reproachful

astonishment, but was compelled to bow low and take the eagerly-proffered hand of the retired merchant.

"Oh, I'm not particular though they don't manifest none," my chum hastened to say. "I'd—yis—I'd rather be furdur away when they begin—'cause, ye see, they moight—just by accident, of course—hit me instead of a wall, or break one of my legs instead of a window. I'm a pacable, quiet man, and would be the last to say a word agin any spirits—especially if they wor good Campbeltown ones, at three-and-sixpence a bottle."

Mr M'Ilwraith was delighted, and hastened to say that the spirits M'Sweeny had so slyly alluded to would be forthcoming in any quantity, his cellar having been lately stocked with the best that money could supply. It was M'Sweeny's easy credulity and inquiring spirit that took the merchant by storm; and my chum soon found that if he only believed every wonder described by his host, there was nothing that Mr M'Ilwraith possessed that he might not freely command. M'Sweeny was forced to stay and dine with them; after which, in the course of the evening, the retired merchant took him down to his cellar, and showed him where the most wonderful manifestations and rappings had taken place. The cellar was a dingy hole, in the basement of the building, having a few barrels of beer and claret and one of whisky at one side, and a number of bottles of champagne and other wines neatly stacked at the other.

"Now, then, Mr M'Sweeny, I think I can suit you," said the elated host, tapping suggestively with his knuckles on one of the barrels. "Will you have a glass of spirits?"

"Is it ghosts or whisky ye want me to drink?" dubiously inquired my chum.

"Real Campbeltown whisky—twelve year's old if it's a day I got the barrel in only a month or two ago."

"Would a duck like swimmin' in a pond of wather?" said M'Sweeny, brightening up and smacking his lips; and a big glass was accordingly produced and filled at the tap—rather a slow process, as the whisky appeared to flow in a very tiny dribble, in spite of repeated blowings and tappings from its owner.

"Something has got into the tap, I'm afraid," said Mr M'Ilwraith in passing, as he handed the brimming glass to my chum, who drained it to the last delicious drop, and pronounced it, with truth in all probability, the finest he had tasted for many a year.

It is possible that he may have drunk more than one glass, but at all events his courage began to rise, and a wholesome spirit of scepticism to take the place of his former superstitious awe; and when Mr M'Ilwraith pointed out the part of the dusty wall most infested by the spirit rappings, he nearly caused his entertainer to faint, by coolly suggesting that the noise might have been caused by the people in the next villa moving about in their cellar.

"Oh, that is impossible; for the fact is, the occupants of the next villa are teetotallers, and never use their cellar," was the grave reply. "No, no; it is simply that I am a medium, and am followed everywhere, and see spirits and talk with the dead oftener than I do with the living."

"I wanst had a hand in the ketching of a medium—ahem! I mane I was present at a table-rapping business," observed M'Sweeny, alluding to an incident already recorded by me; "but the medium there was a regular imposter—tried to stab a particular friend of mine, after making the table tell some awful whoppers; but you haven't got to make your bread by it, and I don't understand it with you. I'm thinking imagination goes a long way."

"Will you believe it if you hear the manifestations yourself?" said Mr M'Ilwraith, with undamped enthusiasm.

"Here, you mane?" inquired my chum, with a loving glance, I suspect, in the direction of the whisky barrel.

"Yes, here—will you stay down here till about ten and hear for yourself?"

M'Sweeny hastened to say that he would stay there all night if the other would allow him; and thus it was arranged. The evening passed pleasantly upstairs, where the most extraordinary stories of ghost seeing and second sight were poured into M'Sweeny by Mrs Anson and the retired merchant; and then, after supper, he and his host again descended to the cellar, in which they sat in solemn silence for nearly an hour. At eleven o'clock Mr M'Ilwraith, to whom spirit rappings were so common an occurrence as not to excite great interest, said he would retire, and, much to M'Sweeny's concern, he did leave the cellar; after which the little courage possessed by my chum slowly and surely evaporated. Possibly he would have fortified himself from the barrel, but Mr M'Ilwraith had taken the key of the tap with him. About twelve o'clock, when the whole house was still as the grave, M'Sweeny started up in his chair and listened, looking gravely and incredulously round the

cellar, with his hair almost rising on end as he did so. He heard a sound, the distinct sound of footsteps, but whether it was above him or under him he could not tell. The only thing he knew was that they were *near* him—so uncomfortably near that he half expected to feel the breath of the invisible walker on his face. The feet seemed to walk straight across the floor, with a hollow, cavernous sound, and to pause in front of the barrel in which M'Sweeny had taken so deep an interest. Then there was a sound like the putting down of a big can on the brick floor in front of the barrel, at which M'Sweeny was now staring with distended eyes, then the distinct sound of the turning of a tap, and then the musical guggling of whisky flowing from the tap and falling noisily into the can! All this seemed to take place before my scared comrade's eyes—right under his nose, in fact—yet the sawdust on the floor was not so much as ruffled by the footsteps, the tap seemed unturned, and no can or flowing whisky was to be seen, rub his eyes, or pinch himself, or desperately tug at his hair, as he liked!

"Good Lord above us! what does it mane?" he thought, with a deathly sweat breaking out over his body, and making a feeble attempt to rise on his shaking legs. "There's something in it after all. Can it be possible that spirits are fond of spirits, and are carrying away some to have a wake somewheres—somewheres over beyant there where they live? Sure, I can't be drunk or draming—all that I tasted is out of me head hours ago. Faix, the sooner I'm out of here the better."

Still unwilling to make an ignominious flight, and half suspicious that the sounds came from below the floor, he got hold of a long spigot and prized up one of the bricks of the floor, with the discovery that below there was nothing but the damp earth. Then he replaced the brick and scrambled out of the cellar as quickly as possible. He was poking about in the room above, which happened to be the scullery, bearing the lantern which he had brought from the cellar, when Mr M'Ilwraith appeared, and heard his story with a satisfied smile.

"My dear sir, you need not trouble to search for them—I did so too at first, but they are not to be found," that gentleman hastened to assure him.

Still loth to give in, M'Sweeny said—

"Mebbe it might have been some one in the green behind. By your lave, I'll go out and have a look round."

This was at once agreed to, Mr M'Ilwraith only telling him

to do so as quickly as possible, as the ladies and servants were all in bed.

The outer door at the back was locked and bolted from within. These fastenings M'Sweeny undid, while Mr M'Ilwraith retired to his books by the parlour fire.

Outside there was neither moon nor stars; and every window behind in both villas being in darkness, M'Sweeny, who had intentionally left the lantern behind, had to grope his way, after softly closing the door behind him. Scarcely had he gone thus two yards from the house when he was struck a violent blow between the shoulders—a heavy, hard blow, as from a fist of iron, and he jumped round with a loud and angry—

“What the devil do you mane?—why!—what! there's nobody there!”

He stood there groaning and squirming, trying in vain to get at the injured place with his hands, which I can testify was next day not only swollen, but nearly all the colours of the rainbow, and peering blankly at the closed door outside of which he had fully expected to see his assailant. M'Sweeny's feelings at the moment cannot be described by me, as this part of his narrative was incoherent and vague. I suspect, however he *dropped*—that his trembling legs gave way, and that for some moments he was cowering in abject terror on the damp ground, uttering in all probability the most piteous entreaties for mercy, and promises of less scepticism in future. At length, however, seeing that the attack was not repeated, he again turned to explore the green and garden, and had satisfied himself beyond doubt that no hidden assailant lurked within its walls, when, as suddenly as he had before been nearly knocked over with the invisible iron fist, a hand seemed to descend from above with a sharp thud on his hat, to grasp it in its invisible claws, and lift it bodily from his perspiring scalp. With a shout of terror M'Sweeny glanced up, and saw his hat sailing steadily and majestically up into the darkness, with neither wind nor hand touching it; and then, with a shriek that no ghost could have excelled, he turned from the haunted house, dashed at the six-foot fence of the garden, scaled it like a monkey, and in a moment was flying, as fast as legs could carry him, through the Grange in the direction of his own home. How he got home and spent the night does not appear, but he had both a lengthened face and a wonderful story to lay before me next morning.

"The house is haunted or bewitched!" was his serious remark in concluding. "Begorra, I wouldn't be surprised if it was carried off in blue fire some night; for them spirits or ghosts is moighty strong, as you'll admit if you unbutton me shirt and look at my shoulder. There's no human hand could lave a mark like that."

I looked at the bruise and grinned callously; but I was really more puzzled than I cared to show. That there was some clever jugglery in the whole case I had not the slightest doubt, but that I would be able to lay bare the tricks was not so certain.

I went out to the Grange at once, and was introduced to Mrs M'Ilwraith and her dear companion, Mrs Anson. What Mrs M'Ilwraith told me did not tend to enlighten me much; but, astonishing to relate, while I was busy conversing with her close to the window of the room into which I had been shown, the thick plate glass forming the lower half of the window suddenly crashed inwards in a hundred fragments without any appearance of a missile having caused the smash. I rushed to the window. There was no one in the green or garden below. I ran down, and through the scullery, only to find the door fast locked and barred, as it had been, I was told, from the moment that M'Sweeny's flight had been discovered. I ran up again and was met by the servant, who had been working in some of the upper rooms, and Mrs Anson, who, with uplifted hands, exclaimed—

"I heard a crash—it is surely not another of the windows broken?"

Now, if there is anything more dangerous than another, it is over-acting a part. Mrs Anson, it seemed to me, was over-doing her ignorance. Any one with ears in their head could have said a hundred yards off that a window had been smashed, and yet here was she affecting wonder and artless inquiry. I distrusted the woman from that moment.

But how had the window been broken? that was what concerned and puzzled me most. No missile had been projected into the room, or found in the green below; the glass had certainly not been broken from within, for it had been done in my presence, and yet it was broken. My only solution of the difficulty was a suspicion that it might have been broken *from above*. But how? That was more than I could decide at the moment. Disguising my suspicions, I managed to get Mrs Anson to descend to the garden and green to make a narrow

search for any hidden assailant or missile; and the moment she was outside, I coolly locked the back door and ran up-stairs, past the dining room, up to the room occupied by Mrs Anson, which I had ascertained was directly above the room in which the window had been broken. The door was locked! Without a moment's hesitation I threw my whole weight against the door and burst it inwards. My first discovery was a nail in the centre of the wooden window sill, for which there was apparently no use; then I turned out everything that was loose, knowing I had but a minute or two to work in, and at length came upon a heap of strong whip cord in a tin hat box, into which it had evidently been bundled in rough haste; near one end of the cord was a running loop, and at the other was a stone weighing five pounds, firmly secured. When the loop was slipped on to the nail head in the window, and the stone projected violently outwards, I found that the cord was exactly of a length to bring back the stone with a tremendous thud on the shattered window. Nor was that all; for in turning out a drawer I came upon another long cord, to which was attached a heavy-handled carving fork. What this was designed for I could not at first divine, till a subsequent search in a locked drawer revealed M'Sweeny's spirited-away hat, crushed out of all shape, and having two holes in its crown, which exactly matched the two prongs of the heavy fork, which had simply been dropped down on it with unerring force, stuck into it, and borne it off into the darkness, to the horror of the wearer. Other contrivances I discovered, the use of which I could not conjecture, but these two chiefly interested me, and when I showed them to Mrs M'Ilwraith, she had no hesitation in allowing me to take the cunning dissembler with me. Mrs Anson, now hammering loudly at the back door, was admitted by me, and nearly tore my eyes out in return for my activity. I got her to the Office in a cab, where she was at once locked up; and then I had the most difficult part of my task to begin—namely, the tracing of the missing jewel. I fully expected to have found the trinket among Mrs Anson's magpie-like stores, but I did not. It was only when I found that she had been in the habit of visiting some poor friend in the Cross-causeway that I came on the real clue. The friend there I soon ascertained was a drunken husband, a blind man, who nevertheless had been able to find his way to a pawnbroker's with the stolen jewel. So I took him too, and plainly informed him on the way to the Office that the jewel had not been a present

to his wife, as he insisted, but was stolen, and that he would probably be saved the trouble of journeying to the public-house for many a month to come.

Only one mystery remained unsolved—namely, the spirit-rappers in the cellar. I went out to look after them, and after some investigation chanced to hammer the whisky barrel with my fist, when it gave out such a hollow sound that I insisted to its owner that it could not be full of good spirits, as he alleged, but must be nearly empty. To prove it, I moved the barrel single-handed, but it did not come away from the wall without an ominous cracking, and when we looked behind we found some of the bricks dislodged, and running through them a tin pipe, which had broken off in moving the barrel. To move round to the next villa did not take many minutes, more especially when Mr M·Ilwraith had proved that his barrel of whisky was nearly empty. The coachman in the next villa insisted that the cellar had not been entered since he came to the house, and that the key was lost; but we broke in the door, and found ample evidence that it had been entered but lately, in a keg or two of Mr M·Ilwraith's whisky, and the tap by which it had been run off still protruding from the disjointed bricks.

I took the coachman with me, and found the key of the cellar in his pocket when I got to the Office. It appeared that he had not only been liberal in giving bottles of whisky to his friends, but had actually arranged to sell a quantity to a dealer at a cheap rate, saying very truly that it was "illicit."

Mr M·Ilwraith looked exceedingly sheepish at the trial, and appeared to enjoy the incessant laughter least of any one present. Mrs Anson, the cunning adventuress, and her blind husband, got each nine months' imprisonment, while the coachman—the real spirit rapper—got off with six.

M'Sweeny got back his hat, and used to be sympathetically asked if the rain didn't get in at the two holes left by the claws of the demon spirit that bore it away. Of course, the violent blow on the back from the invisible iron fist was nothing but a thud from the five-pound stone let down on him by the ingenious medium, Mrs Anson, from above.

UNCLAIMED MONEY

"Yo-ho! yo-ho! yo-ho!" in a regular sailor's shout, came peeling up the stairs leading to the "reception room" at the Central Office, one afternoon in summer; and we all started round in surprise, and feeling much as if a pure whiff from the briny deep had suddenly been wafted to our stifling quarters.

Following the shout came a burly and rather handsome seaman, in first mate's go-ashore dress, smiling all round with the utmost good-humour, and evidently blissfully unconscious in his simplicity of having disturbed officials at their work. The man was a shaggy, powerful fellow, some years under forty, and though not drunk, had evidently drawn some of his jollity and friendliness from the bottle.

"Morning, mates—morning to you all!—glad to see you, if I'm in the right bunk," he said, saluting us generally with a beaming look before which scowls were bound to vanish. "I want to see that detective chap as writes the book. It's him I want—none o' your common ones for me. I want to clap my eyes on him, and speak to him particular—on business."

"D'ye mane Jamie there, or me?" inquiringly interposed M'Sweeny, with some eagerness. "To be sure he had the writing down of the things, but, begor, it's meself that figures most in it. I'm M'Sweeny."

"No, it ain't you—it's the *real* detective chap—the one that licks you all—the one that wrote the book," said the sailor, with steady persistence and unflattering frankness. "You're no use but to get him into trouble, and get awful wallopings and ropes-endings—oh, I read about you, and I'm not to be cheated that way. Fact is, I'm awful fly—I'm about the fliest A. B. afloat or ashore, and they'd be very smart chaps that would do me."

"It's Jamie M'Govan you mean," said the sergeant, as M'Sweeny moved back somewhat precipitately. "Well, that's him, over there."

The sailor advanced towards me, and dubiously and wonder-

ingly extended his hand, and at last exclaimed, in manifest surprise—

"Well—I'm—blowed! You're just like an ordinary man."

"So I am an ordinary man," I laughingly observed, after rescuing my crushed fingers from his tremendous grip.

"Hold hard there—I can't allow that, you know," he determinedly returned. "You ain't an ordinary man; fact, it's a regular crammer to say so, but you're not what I expected to see for all that. I thought you'd be a reg'lar swell, with white kid gloves on, and lots of starch and black clothes. Are you sure you're Mc'Govan?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, well, and I'm a holding on to the hand that wrote that book as we all piped our eyes over, last voyage?" he reflectively observed, with another dive at my squeezed fingers. "We read your book, turns about, when we'd nothing to do, and sometimes it took two on us to finish a story—got kinder choked up, ye know. I'd like to see Sparrow, too, that poor lad that made the awful fight to keep square, but I s'pose he ain't about?"

I replied that Sparrow was no longer a lad, but a prosperous man years ago, and that even I had not seen him for years; and then, as he had spoken of coming to see me on business, I added inquiringly—

"I suppose you've got into trouble since you came ashore?—gone and lost your money or your watch, or something?"

"You think so?" he returned with great glee and exultation. "You, the fly detective, think I've been done? Well, that's good!" and he had a delighted slap at his thigh. "You're wrong, for I've got every blessed stiver of it here—my own pay and grannie's money—all in this bag;" and he quickly produced a canvas bag, such as they use in banks for silver, and gave it a huge rattle, which convinced every one within hearing that it contained a good sum in solid coin of the realm. "And look here;" and still more gleefully he produced a massive gold chronometer, which he pulled out much as he would have pulled out his rope knife, at the end of a bit of common twine, and shoved bodily into my hands for inspection. "Now, ain't I a downy one? There they are safer than the bank, and that's just what brought me here."

"How? what do you mean?"

"I want you to take care on them for me," he said, with the most perfect reliance. "I'm going to knock about among old

friends, and when I get too much beer in my head, I just throw my money away, that's a fact, so I brought it to you."

I was staggered, and not sure whether to look grave or amused.

"Really," I began, in gentle demur, "that is not quite in my line."

"Oh yes, it is," he confidently returned. "You're Al at holding on to things—see? so you'll be the safest man to take care on my shiners."

"It would be better in the bank," I suggested. "Take it there and get a deposit receipt for it, and it'll bear interest."

"Get along! Interest be blowed! and banks failing every day! No, thankee—I've just took it out of the bank," he replied, with a look of great penetration. "Drewed the money there that my poor old granny left me—£200, all in gold; they couldn't cheat me with their bits of printed paper—not them. I'm too precious fly for them. They wanted back this bag, too, but I chucked them a shilling, and said the bag was the very thing I needed to hold it in—nice an' handy, you see, with a string at the top to tie it up with."

"But haven't you any friends that you could leave it with?" I persisted, in some surprise.

"No friends now—all dead—slipped their cables," he answered, with some emotion. "Father went years ago; mother followed; and poor old granny, that doted on me, slipped away last voyage. Sweetheart, that I was quite built up on—as pretty a lass as you ever set eyes on—blooming and bright as peach on a tree—died five years ago. See that ring?" and he held up a stumpy finger, with a mourning ring on, for my inspection. "That's for her memory—poor, sweet Kitty—dear lass—dead and gone!" and he put up the stumpy brown finger to knuckle out a tear. "No; you're the only friend that I knows on—a kinder *people's friend*," he added, pulling himself together again with an effort, "so you're the safest hand I can trust my money with."

I still hesitated; and during the moment or two's silence which ensued, I turned the watch over in my hand, and noticed on the back the letters "J. B.," with a large anchor engraved between the initials.

"That was an idea of my own," he observed, indicating the letters and anchor. "J. B." stands for me, Jim Brennan, and the anchor means that the watch is anchored to me—never to be give away, or sold, or that. 'Twas my father's sea-going

watch—a thirty guinea one—so I'm kind of set on it. Now that I think on it, though, I'll take the watch with me; I can stick to it firm enough. It's the shiners that bother me to keep, now that I haven't Kitty to dream on or save for. Nothing like a true, loving heart and a pair o' bright eyes to keep Jack straight."

He slung back his watch by the string; but the bag of money he would not take, or even touch.

"No; you take care on it, and I'll be back afore I go aboard for next voyage, and take it then, and stow it away in my sea-chest. None o' them land-sharks can get at it here, see? My, ain't I a downy one to bring it here; fly as—as a detective? Fact, I believe I'd beat *you* at that, if I tried;" and the great simple fellow chuckled himself purple in the face at the thought, and then proceeded to shake hands with us all round, in joyous satisfaction at having got a weight off his mind, as well as out of his pocket, before taking leave.

"Hadn't you better count it before you go?" I suggested, still puzzled with the novel trust.

"No need for that—they bank chaps never makes a mistake," he carelessly answered. "It's kepp out of their wages if they do. I've took ten out for my pocket, and you'll look arter the rest. See, I'll put a sailor's knot, that never slips, in the string; there, it's safer than if it was shut up in an iron press. Good arternoon, the whole on you; good arternoon!" and away he went, with his rolling gait, and easy, good-natured smile, quite satisfied that he had done a clever thing, while the bag of sovereigns was put away in a place of safety, along with other articles of value, awaiting claiming by their owners.

Of course, I fully expected that, after a few days, Jim Brennan would reappear, cleaned out, and somewhat less good-natured, and claim his bag of money; but in that I was disappointed. Not one week, but many went by, and yet the bag of money lay untouched and unsought for. Nor did the circumstance either surprise or alarm me. I had no idea that any calamity had overtaken him, and simply concluded that he had gone off to sea again—perhaps too hastily to be able to call at the Central—and left me guardian of his money, believing the Police Office safer than a bank. I might have forgotten the curious circumstance, but for an incident which recalled the trust, and at the same time roused in me an eager wish to learn more of my eccentric depositor. In looking over some pledged jewellery at a pawnbroker's on the Bridge, in search

of a ring that was reported stolen, I came upon a gold chronometer, more carefully secured and packed in the safe than its neighbours. A chance remark about its massiveness and beauty elicited the statement that the watch was an unusually valuable one, and that they had advanced £10 upon it. I took the watch in my hand, turned it over, and then caught sight of an anchor engraved in the centre of the engine-turning, with the initials "J. B." planted on either side of the emblem of hope.

"Dear me, I've surely seen this watch before?" I said, for the moment puzzled; and then I remembered the sailor, and recognised the watch perfectly as his.

The pawnbroker, fearing a loss, began to look concerned indeed while I opened the case and examined it closely; yet it was not any curiosity to see the inside of either case or watch, or the number of the watch, that prompted the action. While I had been examining the back of the case, something like a crimson line running for fully an eighth of an inch along the edge caught my eye, and on pressing the spring I found what looked very like a dried trickle of blood running a short distance in from the edge, as if blood had been there, and in spite of the close fitting joint of the case had percolated in a little before being wiped away outside. Still, I cannot say that even then I felt much concern or alarm. The sailor might have cut his finger, and in touching the watch stained its case slightly. The thing which did concern me, however, was to find the watch in a pawnshop—the valued instrument which he had told me was "anchored to him," never to be parted with or sold. I knew that it had not gone there through any want of money on his part, for he had nothing to do under such circumstances but come up to the Office and claim that which he had left there; and I felt certain that a man of his tender nature and feeling heart would part with such a gift under only the greatest pressure. My inference, then, was, that Brennan had been robbed, and that by some very unusual freak of chance the stolen watch had found its way to the pawnbroker's instead of the fence's. I therefore inquired very promptly for the name and address of the person who had pawned the chronometer. These were at once given; but they proved fictitious. The man who had pawned the watch had presented certain peculiarities of manner and dress, however, which both the pawnbroker and his assistant were able to describe, and by these I imagined I recognised a kind

of nondescript—neither a thief nor an honest man—known as Griddler Bob; a man who chanted dismal songs on the street on wet or drizzling days; who begged, and lied, and dodged his way through life, with just enough cunning to keep well out of my way. I thought proper to take the chronometer to the Office with me, pending inquiries; and then I found Griddler Bob, and took him up to the pawnbroker's for identification, with indifferent success. The people there both thought he was the man who had pawned the watch, but would not swear to him; and Bob himself, when I appealed to him for information, swore most energetically that he knew nothing of the watch, or its owner, or its history. He had never had such a valuable in his possession as long as he had lived. It struck me that the Griddler had looked too much scared on being taken to the pawnshop, and that he was altogether too voluble in his defence for me quite to credit his innocence; but there was really no charge lodged against him or any one, and of course we had to let him go. The little trickle of blood, which I pointed out to Bob for explanation, and which appeared to disconcert him more than any of my other questions, pointed to no fresh clue. Its history remained untold, and I had patiently to wait for fresh clues, hoping thus to get at the solution of the mystery.

A month or two later, I was going down Leith Street, when I saw a burly-looking seaman—whom I imagined I recognised at a glance as Jim Brennan—crossing the street towards me. I paused, to allow him to approach and recognise me; and in a moment our eyes met.

I expected his broad, kind face to expand instantly in delight and pleasure; but what was my surprise to see his full-coloured face instantly become blank with dismay, and then livid with terror, and the moment after to see him turn and dash down the street with the speed of a man running for life. I followed him swiftly, though not at a desperate pace, as I was really curious to learn what had induced him to leave the money so long unclaimed, as well as to get from him some account of how he had been forced to part with his much-prized chronometer; but for once I was out-distanced with ease.

Brennan, or at least the man I had startled, vanished down the Low Calton towards Leith Wynd, and I saw him no more. More puzzled than ever, but sure that I had not made a mistake, and anxious to get at him while he was home from sea, I inserted an advertisement in two daily papers, to the effect that

"James Brennan, seaman, was requested to call on Detective M'Govan, at his earliest convenience, on a matter of importance;" but the money appeared to be thrown away, for no Jim Brennan appeared.

All this time I had had little doubt that the Griddler had pawned the watch; but the very fact that he had done so—probably intending to sell the ticket also for a good sum—implied a confidence against results that annoyed me considerably. If the chronometer had been forcibly taken from its owner by Bob, it must have been in some unusual way, or it would have gone to a fence's, instead of being boldly shown right under our noses. It was that puzzler which excited my interest most, and now to it was added the curious circumstance that the sailor appeared to dread me, and get out of my way as nimbly as if he had been one of my own "bairns." That there might be a connection between the two circumstances, I must confess, never for a moment struck me.

The next time I met the sailor it was under tantalizing circumstances, for he was driving west in a cab along Princes Street, while I was going east after a newly arrived swell mobsmen, who did not know me, and whom I was anxious to get out of harm's way, before he had time to do much mischief.

I was sure of the sailor's face, though it vanished swiftly from the cab window the moment the eyes lighted on me, but I decided to follow the pickpocket as more legitimate game. As soon as I had collared him in the act and handed him over to one of the staff and the man on the beat, I went west to the Railway Station, and easily discovered that a seaman answering Brennan's description had taken ticket for Glasgow, and left by train not fifteen minutes before my arrival. I at once telegraphed to Johnny Farrel to go and meet him, and try to follow him, as I had no authority to detain or arrest him, merely to satisfy my curiosity; but though Johnny did meet and follow him, he had lost him somewhere on the way to the river, and upon my arrival with the next train had nothing but apologies for his stupidity to offer. I stayed in Glasgow all night, and next day went out on the hunt, and chanced to catch sight of Brennan coming out of a shipping-office near the river. Again the frightful look of dismay and pallor crossed his face, and again a swift dart and terrific race placed him far beyond my reach, and, breathless but unsatisfied, I slowly made my way back to the office which I had seen him leaving. This was not an easy matter, as in my haste I had taken little note of the name or

locality; but when I did find the place I thought my chase was at an end, for I was there shown the articles which Brennan had signed, binding him to sail with an Australian liner then lying in the harbour, and to join the ship that very evening. To give him time to be aboard, I delayed my visit till dusk; and then, accompanied by Johnny Farrel, who had become as interested in the case as myself, I went aboard and confronted him. With the first glance at my face he uttered a cry of terror, and would have dashed past us for the Broomielaw, but seeing Johnny and myself with arms quickly outstretched to intercept him, he wavered and turned, and, before we could anticipate or prevent, he had rushed to the opposite taffrail, clambered up, and with one great jump vanished into the dark river. The startled crew and we at once ran to the ship's side to peer over in hope of seeing him rise, and very quickly a boat was lowered; but he was not seen, and it was feared, by me at least, that he had been carried away by the outflowing tide and stream and drowned. From this fear I was joyfully relieved next day, when I was taking out a ticket for Edinburgh at the railway station, by seeing him pass the station at a brisk pace, seemingly not a bit the worse of his immersion. We sighted each other at the same moment, but this time I was determined not to lose him. He did run, and no mistake! but I got him at last; and with two policemen and the crowd who had joined me, surrounded and pinned him beyond the chance of escape.

"What on earth has induced you to avoid me?" was my first remark when I was able to pant out a word. "Why, Brennan, what were you afraid of?"

"My name isn't Brennan. You've mistook me for some one else," he tremulously answered; and I really began to fear that he was speaking the truth, till I found that he could give no satisfactory reason for avoiding me by such desperate expedients. He pleaded so hard to be let go, that I began to suspect he had done something to deserve being detained, and with a great show of authority, though with difficulty repressing a smile, I insisted on him accompanying me to the Police Office. Then he collapsed helplessly, and said—

"I admit I'm Jim Brennan, Mr M'Govan, but I can swear it was all an accident. I didn't mean to touch him, far less let his life out with the knife."

"With the knife? touch whom?" I amazedly echoed.

"Why, that singing chap that tried to get my watch," he

frankly answered, wiping the thick drops of perspiration from his forehead at the recollection.

"Oh, the watch? Yes; it was about that I wanted to see you; tell me all about that, and then I'll see what I can do for you."

"You will?" he eagerly exclaimed, with an intense relief that was almost touching to behold. "Gi' me your hand;" but I had given him my hand on a former occasion, and, having some regard for the safety of my bones, politely evaded the warm grasp of his vice-like fist.

As soon as we reached the Glasgow Central, he, with a piteous earnestness that called many a smile to my lip, told his story.

"I met some jolly fellows after I left my money with you," he said, "and as they would stand treat, why I treated them back, till I was pretty tight, I can tell you. I don't know where it was that I was drinking with them, but one of them—a bald-headed chap, very soft spoken and red about the nose—axed me to lend him my watch to see what time it was."

"That was the man who sang songs, wasn't it?" I observed, having recognised in the few expressive words a life-like portrait of my esteemed acquaintance, Griddler Bob.

"A1 at singing," returned Brennan, with enthusiasm, "but I didn't see through letting him get his fins on my watch. Then he tried to take it when I got it out to tell him the time—fact I believe he did get it out of my hand, but I can't remember it all exactly as it happened, and then I out with my knife, and told him pretty sharp that if he didn't hand it over, I'd rip him with the knife."

"And he gave it up?"

"No, he didn't; so I at him with the knife," and Brennan shuddered and paled at the thought. "I'm peaceable and good-natured if I'm let alone, but the darned thief was taking away my watch, and the drink kinder maddened me. There was an awful lot of squealing among the wimen folks, and they got him away from me at last, but not till I had done for him with the knife."

"Killed him, you mean?" I echoed, with much surprise.

"Nigh about it. He was bleeding plenty, and they carried him off, and a short time after, one of them as was kinder friendly to me come to me and whispered to me to come and see him. He was lying in a bed with a face as white as the sheets, and his eyes rollin' in his head. He was gasping out his last breath, in fact. I was mighty concerned, and tried to get him to say

I wasn't to blame, but he was past speaking. They took me out of the room, and I think I had more drink; but after a bit one o' them came to me and said he was dead, and that one of them was away up to the Office to report, and to bring down M'Govan, the detective. 'What am I to do?' I says; and they whispered, as friendly as you like, 'Get out of the way and keep there, for M'Govan is a man that won't be beat, though he had to follow you to the other side of the world.' I know'd it was time, and I bolted at once."

"Without your watch, of course?" I grimly observed.

"Oh, yes; that went in the scrimmage, and I never thought it worth while to ax for it. I was too precious concerned at having croaked the man wi' my knife."

"That was a nice plant," I remarked, as he concluded. "Are you sure that you touched him at all with the knife?"

"Oh, certain, for some of the blood went on the watch in his hand—fact, that was the last I saw of it."

"Well, well, you are a simpleton after all," I cried, with a burst of laughter that made him wonderingly open his eyes. "It was all a do—all a plan to rob you of your watch; and if the man you thought you saw dying isn't as well at this moment as you are, so far as the injury done him by you is concerned, I will forfeit the value of your watch twice over."

"Then what have you been chasing me for, and hunting me all over with police, and detectives, and what not, till I thought I'd better go and hang myself to be done with it?" cried the simple fellow.

"I wasn't chasing you till you ran; but I did want to see you about the watch, which your dying man had been strong enough to pawn the very next day, and also about that money which you left with me. Did you mean never to claim it?"

"I meant to give you a precious wide berth," said Brennan, with great earnestness. "The money might go; what was that to being strung up at a rope's end?"

I laughed long and loudly at his gravity, which to me appeared irresistibly comical; and then I gave him the history of the watch so far as it was known to me, adding a few facts about Griddler Bob which effectually relieved his mind of the dread and horror to which it had been a prey for so many months. And when I added that I had his valued chronometer in safety, and that I had little doubt but it would be restored to him soon, the honest fellow all but took me round the neck in the exuberance of his joy.

I returned to Edinburgh and hunted hard for the Griddler, but I found that he had vanished from the city. A few weeks later I chanced to be in Dundee, and in passing up the Overgate one Saturday night among the motley passengers there crowding the street, I heard a familiar voice stentoriously drawling out the words—

“O, fa-ather, dear fa-ather, you’ll die a public show,
For the murder of young Will-yam, that ploughed the lowlands low.”

I pressed through the crowd surrounding the singer at once, and tapping him on the shoulder, said quietly—

“I want you, Bob, for that watch business. I’ve got it all cut and dry now, and I think I can book you for seven years.”

Bob was slow to believe me; and even when I got him to the Office, showed me a slight scar on his hand, which he declared the sailor had inflicted with his knife before going away, and leaving the watch as a present in compensation for the injury. This ingenious story was ruthlessly ridiculed at the trial, and the jury agreeing with the judge, the Griddler was duly sent for the seven years I had promised him.

When the trial was over, I handed Brennan his watch and his money; but I noticed that his big glistening eyes were particularly bright and full of meaning, while, instead of at once pocketing the prized chronometer, he only fingered nervously with the dangling string, and at last said—

“I say, Mr M’Govan, I’d take it as a particular honour if you’d take this as a present, to wear it—mind, to wear it. I’m sure you’re better able to take care on it than I am.”

My reply was to pull out my own faithful old silver lever, with the words—

“Look at that faithful old servant, Mr Brennan. It has served me for the best part of my life as unerringly as a watch can serve any one. Don’t you think it would be the height of ingratitude on my part to discard it, simply because I am offered one with a yellow covering instead of its shining white one? I see you’re convinced. Let us both stick to our friends, and try to emulate their regularity and good habits.”

Jim Brennan took my hand in both his own; but his heart was too full for him to exert his wonderful strength, and I escaped with a pressure as gentle as a woman’s.

“LARKS!”

I HAVE repeatedly had occasion to show that none are more liable to be imposed upon and cruelly robbed than thieves, just as those tiny creatures that trouble the uncleanly are found, when examined under a microscope, to be similarly afflicted in turn. But who is to guard the unhappy thief? who is to detect for the hard-working scoundrel, who at much personal risk has possessed himself of some one else's property? Alas, the thief has never been provided for; he is forced to essay the new *role* of hunter instead of hunted himself; and the result, as I will here show, is not always a success of dazzling brilliancy.

Among the many cabs rushing down to the Waverley Station, one busy Saturday in June, was one bearing a common brown painted wooden trunk. The box was not big, but it was heavy, as the railway porters found when they hastened to help the cabman to put it on the luggage truck in waiting. The cab itself contained only a young girl, having that unmistakable boldness of manner which stamps the owner as belonging to the shady side of life. The girl knew nothing whatever of the box or its contents beyond the fact that she had been in a roundabout fashion engaged to see it safely to the Railway Station. On the lid of the trunk was tacked a card bearing the words—

“P. BRIMMER,
Passenger;”

and this legend being manifestly incomplete, the porters turned to the girl to ask what station the box was to be ticketed for.

“Dundee—be sure you ticket it for Dundee,” was her reply, and she was careful to wait by the truck till the thin yellow label was securely gummed on the lid of the box immediately below the ticket. She then disappeared into the booking office, after paying the cabman, leaving the trunk to be stowed-up with piles of other boxes, and finally hurled down to the

platform for "Fife and the North," for transference to the luggage wagon.

The whole of this common-place scene had been witnessed from a safe distance by a person dressed like a working man, and trying with indifferent success to assume the air of an honest toiler about to change the scene of his labours. This man—who, among many *aliases*, owned those of Pete Brimmer and "Slotty"—the last being acquired by a comic habit he had of slotting people with a knife when he was hard pressed—no sooner saw the girl vanish from the booking-office in the direction of the stair up to the North Bridge, than he carelessly sauntered past the luggage truck into the booking office, giving a passing glance, as he did so, to ascertain that the luggage label was right for Dundee, and then took his place within the ticket rail and duly booked himself third-class for Dundee.

What I hinted as to the minute biters being themselves subject to be bitten will now recur to the reader. No sooner had Slotty vanished from the booking office in the direction of the platform, than a man who had been bending over a timetable at the window immediately above the drawer containing the luggage labels, slipped out towards the luggage truck bearing something in his palm which he had drawn across his tongue a moment before. The whole of the porters were busy with other matters, and, while bending over the truck as if to make sure that *his* luggage was all right, the stranger managed to deftly clap another yellow label on top of that already affixed to the brown trunk. He then turned calmly to the booking office, took out a ticket, and made his way down to the train with the crowd, being careful to slip into the first carriage that came to hand.

In crossing the ferry to Burntisland, Slotty was careful and concerned enough to look in the big luggage trucks for his trunk, and saw an end of the familiar brown box peeping from under the tarpaulin cover. When he reached the other side, therefore, and saw these trucks brought up by horses from the steamboat, he gave his luggage no further concern, but took his place in that part of the train for Dundee, with a deep sigh of satisfaction at having got away from Edinburgh, and out of all danger, so securely and successfully.

Meantime the box had reached the platform of the Burntisland Station, and stopped there, being legibly labelled "Burntisland." Among the last to come up from the boat was the man who had manipulated the labels and he, after a visit

to the refreshment bar, which lasted till the train had gone, came out with great importance, and went poking about the pile of luggage, saying—

“Brimmer—Brimmer—isn’t there a box of mine in the truck? Ah, there it is—that brown one, porter—thank you!”

The man thus claiming the box was shabby and disreputable looking enough, but what suspicion could the porters have of a man who was almost the last to claim his luggage, which in turn bore the name he had given, and was labelled for that very station? The luggage being duly surrendered, the next question of its new owner was how to get it conveyed from the station. Some would have simply waited for the next train, and gone on to Perth, or some other distant town, but this was too transparent a movement to suit Mr Bob Nailer, otherwise the “*Sheffield Blade*.” After some inquiries at the station, from which it appeared that Mr Nailer had come across to Burntisland for a change of air, he was directed to a furnished lodging a short distance from the station, and after a visit to the house in question he employed a man to convey thither the box, and a carpet bag which he had carried in his hand. The lodging was exorbitantly high in price, as it was near the beach, and the best time for visitors was at hand, but as that was nothing to a man who did not mean to pay for them, there was a charming absence of haggling over terms. The *Sheffield Blade* was delighted with the lodging, and the landlady was delighted with her lodger—more especially when his heavy baggage was brought in and carefully stowed into the bedroom. As soon as Mr Nailer had paid and dismissed the porter, he found that he had inadvertently left home without his keys, but was lucky enough to find one in the landlady’s bunch which opened the brown trunk. He remained shut in the room, with the door snibbed, for a full half-hour after being so favoured, at the end of which time he appeared with the carpet-bag—which before had been light and flat, but was now somewhat distended—in his hand. He had some business to attend to throughout the town, but would be back to dinner, which he ordered with much nicety and epicurean exactness. He then vanished from the house and the town as effectually as if he had quietly loaded his feet with weights and dropped himself into a deep hole in the Forth. The carefully prepared dinner got leave to simmer and frizzle itself into useless fragments, and the landlady began to be thankful that the trunk was left behind—containing, as she ascertained the moment

her new lodger left, some wearing apparel and other articles of some value, and not merely a heap of stones, or a couple of screw-nails fastening it to the floor.

A little later in the day, Slotty arrived at Dundee, and turned to the luggage van in pleased confidence to receive his trunk, and was petrified to find that no such trunk was there. Then he swore horribly, and said that the Railway Company would have to pay for the loss, and plainly hinted that the missing trunk contained valuables for which he would not have accepted a hundred pounds. No amount of reasoning could convince him that such valuables could scarcely be called personal luggage, and that therefore the Company could not be responsible for their loss—damages to the full amount he expected, or the box returned.

At first a suspicion prevailed that by a mistake the trunk had been sent to Perth with the other half of the train; but a telegram to that city speedily proved that they were mistaken, and that no such box had been in the Perth luggage van from the time of parting at the junction. The inference was clear—the box must have been left at some of the stations on the way. Slotty, for reasons that will soon appear, objected to informing the police of his loss, and at once elected himself his own special detective, and, so far as his first movement was concerned, did not do badly in the new character. He took the first train back in the direction of Edinburgh, inquiring sharply at every station on the way for a brown painted trunk, bearing the name of Peter Brimmer, and labelled for Dundee. In this way he progressed as far as Burntisland, where at last he was rewarded with a clue. Then his rage knew no bounds, and he swore with such heartiness and appalling zest, that it was evident that he considered thieves the pests of the universe, and fit only to be strung up on the spot when discovered. The porter who had taken the box to the lodging was easily found, and Slotty was soon standing before his box, which he unlocked only to go black in the face with indignation and anger. He danced about like one insane, tore at his short-cropped hair—harmlessly, of course—and finally declared that he was a ruined man—that he had been robbed of watches and jewellery amounting to about £150, and that he would hold the railway responsible for the loss. The means by which the robbery had been managed were patent to the eye, for there was the Burntisland label on the box-lid, and underneath they speedily found the proper one for

Dundee. Slotty, in all his passion, was careful to announce his intention to take away such of his property as had been left; but to this the railway officials fortunately objected. Slotty's appearance was not prepossessing; a robbery had been committed; it was just possible that he was not the real owner; they would take possession of the box and its contents till an investigation was made. Slotty declined to leave his address, and when pressed to do so, gave a fictitious one. Possibly his reason was for the moment unhinged: certainly he went out muttering, and stamping, and grinding his teeth as energetically as ever confirmed maniac was fit to do; and to understand the drift of his mutterings, it is necessary to here insert the thoughts which were not allowed to reach the ears of the railway men.

“After me acting fair and square with him, and dividing fair, to cut up treacherous like this! Why shouldn't I go back to town and just slot him for it? I'd like to, and he deserves it, but then he'd p'r'aps kick up a row, and turn round and peach, and send M'Govan or some of them after me. No, that wouldn't do. Oh, Tommy! if I had yer this minit, wouldn't I give it you sweet?”

Nor was revenge the uppermost or most troublesome thought in Slotty's brain. The firmness of the railway people in detaining the box had added to his other troubles a wholesome concern for his own safety. Among those articles which the thief had thought not worth burthening himself with, was a little claw-footed electro-plated salt-cellar. There were also some bundles of nickle spoons and ivory-handled dinner knives, which appeared not only never to have been used, but never even unfastened. Now, the changed luggage-label clearly indicated that the robbery had been planned in Edinburgh; it was not unlikely that the Edinburgh police would be called in to investigate; and to his bitter regret Slotty now recognised the folly of having affixed his own name to the trunk. After crossing to Granton, pondering these painful points, Slotty, instead of paying a visit to his late companion in crime, Tommy the Twister, otherwise “Apple Jelly,” and forcibly presenting him with the blade of his tobacco knife, thought proper to trudge on foot to Leith, and there get into hiding as quickly as possible.

Exactly what Slotty had anticipated occurred. The robbery of the trunk was reported at the Edinburgh Central, and the moment the electro-plated salt-cellar and ironmongery goods

were mentioned, I conceived a sudden desire to look at the box and its contents. Only a few nights before Slotty's trip to Dundee had been made, a pawnbroker's at the south side had been broken into, and watches, jewellery, electro-plate, and cutlery, part of an ironmonger's stock there deposited, had been taken, to the value of nearly £300. There were clear traces of two men at the job, but up to that moment no clue had been got either to the men or the stolen property. It happened, however, that I was out of town when the welcome news came, and before I returned, a note had been sent in for me by the kindly and well-doing Slotty. "Der M'Govan," he said, "i have to tel you that they pawnbroker's was dun by Apple Jelly—you now who I mean, just tommy, the Twister; so take him as sun as you plese. i will give you more facts by an by. one as nows."

Neither Slotty's handwriting nor his face were known to me very well, but it was different with his late companion. He was an old bird, whom I had limed a dozen times—a cunning rascal, with a liking for malingering in prison, and who had got his nickname from affecting illness approaching to death in appearance, and then, when asked if he had a wish for any particular dainty, opening his rigid teeth to say, "Gi' me some apply jelly."

When the note betraying him as the burglar came to hand, I had, therefore, as little hope of laying hands on Tommy as I had of catching the moon. I felt certain that there had been some quarrel, and that long before I could get near him he would be miles from the city. It was with no little surprise, then, that on going down to his favourite public-house, I found him deeply intent on a game of dominoes, and looking as calm and unconcerned at my entrance as if he had never fingered a pennyworth that did not belong to him.

"Take a hand, Jamie?" he said graciously.

I declined—I had not time or inclination, and, besides, I was there on business.

"The fact is, I want you," I said at last, seeing him slow to take alarm.

"Me? me?" he echoed, in the most absolute surprise, dropping his ivory cards with a rattle on the table. "What for?"

"The pawnbroker's," I lightly answered, getting the spare link of the handcuffs ready.

Jelly looked too much overcome with mystification and sur-

prise to make an answer, though he quietly held out his dirty paw to be fastened to my own, and bade his companion good-bye in a tone that showed a foreboding of more than a day or two's detention.

The idea of treachery on the part of Slotty never for a moment occurred to him. They had had no quarrel—they had worked harmoniously and successfully together, and had parted the best of friends after fairly dividing the spoil; so how could he look for treachery in that quarter? Besides, Slotty had not a reputation for double dealing—though his skill with the tobacco knife aforementioned and his passionate disposition made him rather a dangerous companion. No; after a swift thought in that direction, Apple Jelly put Slotty aside, and tried to speculate as to what other loose screw in his arrangements had brought his wrist within my bracelet. While he is thus puzzling himself and accompanying me from the public-house at eleven at night, after the manner of a real story teller I must ask the reader to go back a few hours, to follow his faithful friend Slotty in another of his brilliant ideas.

Slotty had been somewhat precipitate, as we have seen, in jumping to the conclusion that Apply Jelly was the traitorous thief. His detective powers indeed were woefully impaired by his passionate temper, for he never once thought of questioning the lodging-house keeper as to the appearance of the thief, or the subsequent movements of the same gentleman. He simply got into hiding in Leith, and then after brooding over his wrongs sent in the note to me. But as soon as the note had been despatched, another brilliant idea came to him like an inspiration.

They had divided the spoil fairly, Slotty deciding to take his share north to Dundee, while Jelly put his away in a hide of his own, pending negotiations for its purchase with a Glasgow fence. Well, seeing that Jelly had robbed Slotty of his share, what could be better than if Slotty, as soon as Jelly was in my clutches—which would be in an hour or so after the receipt of the note—should pay a visit to Apple Jelly's hide, and quietly possess himself of that gentleman's share? It was even possible that in so doing he might get back his own, which would exactly double his profits. Besides, the beloved Twister was in all probability booked for a longish sentence—there being a superstitious idea among my "bairns" that the touch of my bracelets always is followed by a conviction of some kind—and so would not need the valuables in question. The note

was sent to me in the morning, and, rashly reckoning that I had received it, Slotty waited only for darkness to put his plan into execution. The days unluckily were long, but before dusk Slotty was up in Edinburgh and prowling round the den of Apple Jelly—a garret in a narrow close near the top of the Canongate. Some cautious reconnoitring satisfied him that the Twister was from home, though that the garret was not empty he had ample proof in a deep snoring which greeted his ears whenever he got close to the door. Apple Jelly's wife was within, sleeping off the effects of a two days' carouse. This woman was one of muscle and weight, her arm being nearly as thick as Slotty's body. An encounter with her was the last thing he could have wished for, but delay would be in the highest degree dangerous, as Slotty might himself be arrested, or the plunder might at any moment be removed. The room was nearly dark, and the door unlocked; the woman would probably lie like a log if she were not actually kicked into wakefulness. Slotty determined to venture in. Slipping off his shoes and noiselessly raising the latch, Slotty stood within the room, while the great mountain of flesh snored on. The door was reclosed, and then he applied himself to the opening of the hide on the opposite side of the room. This hide consisted of that part of the sloping roof shut off near the window by a low partition of lath and plaster. In this partition an ingenious door had been fitted, made of lath and plaster, so as to give forth the same echo when sounded, the whole being concealed by having pasted over it the lively horrors of the *Police News*. The removing of this covering cost Slotty some work, but at last the door of the hide was open, and the arm of the intruder eagerly thrust into the aperture.

To his intense disappointment he touched no box or bundle of jewellery. He groped madly about—further and further, till he lay sprawling and sweating on his face, with his arm up to the socket in the hide, swearing rapidly in an enforced whisper all the while. Then a new thought came—the hide was long and deep, he himself was slender to a fault—he would go inside and make a thorough search.

He wriggled in at the narrow hole—he got inside—he groped and crawled through every inch of the stifling hole—and then, if he had been gifted with invention, he would have sworn with greater rapidity than before. The hide was absolutely empty! Perhaps one or two of his exclamations, more unguarded than the rest, had reached the garret and disturbed the peaceful

slumbers of Apple Jelly's wife. At all events, Slotty had scarcely put out his head at the door of the hide and wedged himself into the narrow doorway, with the intention of wriggling out again, when the gigantic woman started up, and in a dazed way stared round the room. The light was dim, but it was nevertheless good enough to reveal the head and shoulders of a man protruding from a place more sacred to the occupants than the garret itself. With a sharp cry of anger and alarm the strong woman started up and seized the first weapon that came to hand, which chanced to be a strong earthenware dish, which she brought down on the protruding head with a force that, had the weapon been stronger, must have smashed the skull into fragments. Something had to give way, and fortunately for Slotty it was the weapon, which was shattered by the blow, but not till it had inflicted on Slotty a concussion that made him sprawl in a frog-like way on the floor, too much stunned to be able either to speak or escape. Before he could recover, he was dragged up with one jerk of the muscular arm; and though he was then recognised, he was, in spite of protests, kicked all round the room, and finally carried out of the garret and along the passage, and then precipitated with much zest down the worn and cork-screw stairs.

"Wait till Tommy gets back from Mackie's," said the woman as a parting warning, alluding to the public-house in which Apple Jelly was at that moment showing such surprise at my visit, "and he'll give ye twice what I've give ye."

Poor Slotty! if ever a man had cause to feel angry, it was he. Injury had been heaped upon injury, and now insult and threat were added. When he became sensible enough to sit up, and groaningly feel his sore bones and aching skull, will it be wondered at that his first feeble effort was to get out his beloved tobacco knife?

"Jelly isn't nabbed yet—he's down at Mackie's, and M'Govan's been slower nor usual—I'll nab him!" was his vengeful remark, as he deliberately unclasped the knife and began to sharpen its point on the stone steps upon which he was seated. It is clear that Slotty was far too hasty ever to make a good detective.

As soon as he was satisfied with the keenness of the point of his knife, and able to stand upon his legs with some firmness and without his head swimming at every step, Slotty left the stair and close, and made his way to Mackie's public-house. As he was about to cross the street and enter, I appeared at

the door with Apple Jelly fastened to me by the wrist, and in his haste to duck into an entry out of sight, Slotty forgot his intention with the knife. As soon, however, as he found that he was not pursued his rage returned; and seeing that we passed up an adjoining close to avoid the commotion of the open streets, Slotty dived into the close in our wake. When we were near the top of the close, my prisoner suddenly staggered against me, as if he had been jostled from behind, and cried out—"Somebody's hurt me! I think I'm stabbed!"

At the same moment a rush of footsteps down the close caught my ear, and I distinctly saw a man running; but Jelly's next remark roused some suspicion in my mind that the whole was a plan for escape.

"There he's running, Jamie—loose the bracelet and after him!"

"And lose you at the same time?" I remarked, with a knowing look. "No, thank you."

"But I'm stabbed! Oh! if I didn't know better, I'd swear this was Slotty's work. It's just his style."

I still thought he was shamming, and insisted on his walking out into the High Street; but after one or two groaning steps he dropped on the pavement, looking horribly ghastly, and piteously declaring he could walk no further. I had him carried up to the Office, where an examination speedily showed that he had been stabbed in the side—the knife having actually passed into the flesh, and, after glancing against a rib, passed out again in front. It was not a very dangerous stab, but as it bled profusely at both holes, Jelly soon looked more pale and death-like than he had ever seemed while affecting illness in prison.

Next morning my first business was a trip across to Burntisland, when the moment I read the address on the lid I exclaimed—

"I believe that stab was from Slotty, after all."

The articles found in the trunk—always excepting the greasy rags which Slotty owned as clothing—were easily identified as part of the stolen property, and, apart from the stabbing altogether, I now began to have a strong wish to find out Slotty's abode. Leaving that task to others, however, I began where Slotty had foolishly left off, and traced the real thief—the Sheffield Blade—out of Burntisland and right along Fife as far as Stirling, by the watches and other stolen articles which he had left in his wake at fabulously low prices. The traces

vanished at Stirling, and I suspected that he had there taken train for either Glasgow or Edinburgh. As the former was safest for him, I telegraphed to Johnny Farrel for information, and quickly got word that the Sheffield Blade had been seen in Glasgow trying to form a Watch Club at one of the factories, and would probably be heard of in a day or two.

This was all I wanted, and, leaving him to Johnny, I returned to Edinburgh. By this time Jelly's wife had been allowed to visit the wounded thief in prison, and had given him a full account of her encounter with Slotty, at the same time telling him that that esteemed pal had somehow imbibed the idea that Jelly had robbed him. My arrival with the news of the Sheffield Blade's sharpness supplied a clue to the mystery, more especially when Jelly remembered that Mr Nailer had on one occasion feigned helpless drunkenness, and so overheard some of the two burglars' whispered plans for the disposal of the property. Had it not been that a mere mistake in the address, and some carelessness in packing Jelly's share of the stolen property had led to its recovery in the keeping of the Railway Company at Glasgow, it is very probable that Apple Jelly would not have been nearly so frank in his admissions; but rage is a powerful auxiliary of the detective, and in his heat he now longed for but one consummation of joy—the capture of Slotty.

I tried my best to gratify him, but for many weary days could find no trace of him. I did not believe that he had ventured out of the city, and at length turned to Apple Jelly for advice. He thought for some minutes, scratching his grey head profoundly the while, and then eagerly shouted—“Larks!”

“Larks? what do you mean by that?” I exclaimed, not sure but Jelly wished to have one with me.

“Oh, Slotty's mad about larks, and never lives without one or two. Look for larks, and you'll find Slotty.”

I thought the advice worthless. I did not believe that Slotty would trouble with his pet hobby while lying in hiding, and still less did I believe that I could find him by “looking for larks;” but though the task was a long and weary one, I did find him in the end, and by that very clue. After many a disappointment, and many a prowling after the keepers of larks in Edinburgh, I one day wandered down to Leith, and was passing through a narrow street running from the Kirkgate, when I heard the painful and wild song of a lark in captivity. I looked everywhere for the lark, but could see none, but by ascending a com-

mon stair, I at last got a glimpse of the roof, where I not only saw the lark in question, but Slotty himself seated in his shirt sleeves at the open window, with his heels tilted up and a pipe in his mouth. I did not trouble to shout across, but got down to the street very quickly, called a man from the next street, and went up and politely asked him to put on his coat, after opening the door without troubling to knock. Slotty made a dart for his tobacco knife, which lay on the window-sill ready opened as he had left it after cutting his tobacco; but I was too well aware of his weakness in that direction to let him get near it.

I tripped him up, and while he sprawled on his face, wrenched back his paws and snapped the steel bracelets upon them before he could get out half-a-dozen of his favourite adjectives.

When he became calmer, I took occasion to reproach him for trying to turn detective, when his powers so manifestly did not lie in that direction, at the same time explaining how egregious an ass he had made himself in regard to Apple Jelly. Then his rage was transferred from me to the Sheffield Blade, and he plaintively requested an interview with that gentleman as soon as he arrived in Johnny Farrel's keeping from Glasgow. This request we thought prudent to refuse, as also the joint wish eagerly tendered by him and Apple Jelly, that they might all three be placed at the bar together—with the Sheffield Blade in the centre. They were tried separately; and when Slotty retired with "ten years" ringing in his ears, he was heard to say that he would live it out just to be even with the Sheffield Blade. The affinity of great minds was shown half-an-hour later by Apple Jelly expressing himself in words almost identical. Sheffield Blade, however, was sent to a different prison to complete his sentence; and regarding him and Slotty I have more to say in another sketch.

THE BLOOD-STONE RING.

"I WANT to see the best detective you have on the staff," said a gentleman who appeared at the Central one day in December, when I was away in Ireland, at the same time presenting a card bearing the name Middleton. "I have been robbed right and left in the most mysterious manner possible, and though I am unwilling to suspect any one about me, I can remain passive no longer."

"The best detective?—that's me!" said M'Sweeny with great alacrity, while every one else in the room hastened to hide his mouth with his hand.

"Your name is M'Govan, I suppose?" said the gentleman with a pleased smile, and frankly offering his hand.

"No—not exactly," answered M'Sweeny, with an ill-concealed writhe. "M'Govan is a kind of chum or assistant of mine; but most people prefers me, because if he blunders he loses the case, while if I blunder, begorra! I'm sure to win it;" and M'Sweeny posed grandly, as if waiting for an admiring world to crown him with laurel.

"Well—but really—I think I would rather see M'Govan," hesitatingly interposed Mr Middleton, after an awkward pause.

"Yis, but ye can't, unless ye've got a moighty strong telescope that'll raich all the way to Belfast," said M'Sweeny, with a delighted twinkle of the eyes. "He's gone there after one of our bairns, an' won't be back for three good days anyhow."

After a few moments' consideration, and discovering that there was no other detective then in the Office, Mr Middleton concluded that he would place his case before M'Sweeny.

Mr Middleton was a retired accountant, who rather prided himself upon his own penetration and acuteness, yet in beginning he confessed that the robbery which he came to report had puzzled him completely.

"I live at Rose Mount Villa, out at Viewforth, as you will see by the card," he proceeded to say. "I keep only one servant, and we've had her for ten years—since she was a mere girl, indeed—and I am certain that she at least has no connec-

tion with the robberies. After her there is only my wife and children, these being far too young to know the meaning of the words robbery or valuables."

"Followers, p'raps?" suggested M'Sweeny.

"That is impossible; Mrs Middleton and myself have always been strict on that point. We allow no sweetheart or follower of the servant to come within the garden gate. She may see them outside as often as she is free, but never on my premises. Not that I have any doubt of the girl's steadiness, but it is best to err on the safe side."

"And what have ye missed?" said M'Sweeny, imitating somewhat successfully the business-like look he had seen on my face under such circumstances, and scrawling away rapidly at hieroglyphics meant for notes.

"I have a list of them here;" and, producing a paper, Mr Middleton read aloud the items, which were duly recorded by M'Sweeny, the only alterations being in the spelling and capital letters. "The first article was a mother-of-pearl card-case, mounted with silver, a valued present, which Mrs Middleton would not have lost for ten pounds. That was missed about a month ago. Then there is a solid gold ring of my own, set with a valuable blood-stone. The ring was valued at two guineas, but worth fifty times that sum to me, as I had it given me by a client now dead. I never could understand how that ring vanished, for I seldom took it off except when my hands were unusually dirty—as with working in the garden—and I was about to wash them. It vanished one day as if by magic, and I have never seen it since. That was about a month ago. Then there are five silver teaspoons, missed at different times; a gold watch of Mrs Middleton's, which cost £14; a silver fruit knife, with a mother-of-pearl handle; a lace *vêil*, worth five guineas; and various other trifles, such as gloves, cuffs, collars, silk ties, and feathers."

M'Sweeny finished his translation, and then winked knowingly, and repeated his first suggestion in the single word—

"Followers."

"I think not," said Mr Middleton, less decidedly, however, than at first. "I should as soon suspect my own wife as Jeanie Manners. In fact, when the great commotion was made after the missing of the watch, Jeanie insisted on her mistress searching her box, which, however, was scarcely necessary, as it nearly always stands open, and, besides, Mrs Middleton chances to have a key which opens it, and had gone over the

whole contents before then, after getting Jeanie out of the way for the purpose."

"Hum! sharp practice," was M'Sweeny's admiring comment. "Well, whoever is the thafe, it won't do to let them know that M'Sweeny is after them, because the minit they suspected that they'd take mortal fright, and the stolen things would go into the fire or melting-pot at wanst. It's the terror of me name does it, ye see," he added, in polite explanation. "Some detectives would go out and examine the house, and question the servant sharp and strong, so as to frighten her into confessing, but that isn't my way of working. Couldn't we arrange a nice little trap for them, whoever they are?—say that you and the wife and children are going out to a party, and that you'll likely be all hours in the morning of gettin' back again?"

"Why, we are going to just such a party to-morrow night," eagerly responded the visitor. "The children are just young enough to stay out so late, the eldest being scarcely seven, and the baby only two years and a-half, but it is their aunt's party, and they will probably sleep there."

"That's the sort of thing—the whole house empty and the coast clear," jubilantly returned M'Sweeny. "Does the servant know she's to have the whole house to herself?"

"Oh, yes; perfectly; we offered to let her have a night out for the occasion, but she said she would rather stay and watch the house."

"Very kind and thoughtful of her," said M'Sweeny, with a grin. "Well, you go away an' keep your mind aisy. I'll trot out some time to-day, an' have a quiet look at the house, and you can send me your check keys any time to-morrow, so that I can have the free run of the house widout any one knowing I'm there, if so be as I have to go into it at all."

"You will be on the watch, then, while we are away?"

M'Sweeny winked expressively.

"I would be willing to help you in any way, if you wish it," said Mr Middleton.

"Och, sure, an' there's no need of that. It's only the like of Jamie M'Govan that needs assistants and helpers. I work best single-handed," answered M'Sweeny, with elation and importance. "You rest aisy at your party, and leave all the trouble to me, and in the morning you'll hear good news, if followers are in the job, and I'm not a thundering big donkey."

After stating that the servant, Jeanie Manners, was so care-

ful and trustworthy that she had the free run of the whole house, neither presses nor drawers being locked against her, Mr Middleton took leave. In the course of the day M'Sweeny went out to Viewforth, a south-western suburb near the canal, and studied at a respectable distance the situation of Rose Mount Villa. Unfortunately for M'Sweeny, the place was one of those modern mansions, the plans of which seem to be drawn by machinery, having a plot of so many square feet for a garden, without trees, summer house, or shelter of any kind. There was a back-gate to the garden, and on looking in it at that M'Sweeny could see no convenient hiding-place but a disused hen-house close to the scullery. This commanded a full view of the kitchen door and windows, and also had the advantage of being almost in sight of the gate of the front garden, which could not be opened and entered without the swing of the gate being seen from the hiding-place.

The reader will doubtless wonder how my chum came to fix so decisively upon "followers" as the active agents in the robbery with such slight evidence to guide him, and by no one can this wonder be more emphatically echoed than it was by myself. When the circumstances were narrated to me thus far, I remember distinctly saying to myself that not a "follower" would appear in the case—a thought now entertained, I doubt not, by the reader; but in this I was completely mistaken. That M'Sweeny was right, however, was more to be accounted for on the ground that rare strokes of fortune fall to all detectives alike, than from the weight of evidence pointing in that direction.

The next day was stormy and blustering, with occasional showers of sleet and rain; but as soon as it was dark—that is, shortly after four o'clock—M'Sweeny, provided with the keys which had been sent for his use, went out to Viewforth and got quietly in at the back gate of Rose Mount Villa, closing and locking it after him, and then very thankfully seeking the shelter of the hen-house—a vile-smelling den of brick and wood, with wired-in cage in front, through which he could watch the flitting lights in the house and general evidence of the stir and bustle of preparations for departure. Shortly before five o'clock a cab stopped at the front gate, and was soon driving away, containing Mr Middleton and his wife and the three children, after which M'Sweeny's watch would have been rather irksome and monotonous, but for the restless movements of the single servant left in charge of the house.

For some reason the girl had not drawn down the blind of the kitchen window, and M'Sweeny could watch her every movement by peering out at the door of his cage. First, she got out her pastry board and roller and a pot of jam, and proceeded to make a tempting-looking puff cake, which she placed in the oven. A neat little steak pie, "just a nice size for two," as M'Sweeny remarked to himself with watering mouth, soon followed the puff cake into the oven; and then Jeanie disappeared, and returned with some beautifully-painted tea china, which she dusted carefully, and placed on a tray ready to carry out of the kitchen. The china was the best in the house, and M'Sweeny was not slow to note that cups and saucers were laid for two only.

By and by her work became less arduous, and her peeps into the oven were varied by a constant trotting to the kitchen window and peering out, with her nose and cheeks flattened on the pane, in the direction of the back gate.

"Batherashon! I wish I had not locked the gate," was M'Sweeny's comment; "but sure thrue love laughs at locks, and if he's partic'lar anxious to get a nice tea and a nice chat. it won't be a shut back dure that'll keep him out."

Scarcely had M'Sweeny uttered the comment when the difficulty was solved in an unexpected manner. Jeanie, evidently grown impatient, appeared at the kitchen door, with a little shawl thrown lightly over her head to protect her from the driving snow, and tripped lightly down the walk to the back gate, inserted a key in the lock, opened the gate, and stood long looking in an easterly direction. The looked-for did not appear; and merely pushing to the gate without fastening it, the smart servant lass returned to the house to have another peep at her oven, and then whisk out of the kitchen with her trayful of pretty china.

Almost simultaneously with her disappearance, the front gate was softly pushed open, and M'Sweeny was just in time to catch a glimpse of a man's form moving away in the direction of the front door.

"Now or never!" was M'Sweeny's excited exclamation. "I'll go round by the other side of the house, and the minit he's in at the front dure I'll run in an' collar him."

He left his hiding-place and passed along the back of the house, intending to pause at the end till the bell rang; but just as he reached the corner, stooping low and moving fast to dodge the wind and sleet, he bumped his head full into the

stomach of the intruder. M'Sweeny in the darkness could only see that the man, though respectably dressed, wore a legitimate "keelie cap" of double peaked cloth, and he put out his strong paws and clinched at once. M'Sweeny was himself muffled to the ears, but the intruder needed no invitation to the encounter, but opened the fray by delivering a tremendous kick on my chum's shin bone, at the same time putting forth all his strength in a sudden attempt to strangle him. M'Sweeny replied promptly by tripping up his assailant, and falling heavily on him, so as to drive as much as possible of the breath from his body, and was following this up by a vigorous pounding with his hard knuckles, when a kind of familiar tone in some of the prostrate intruder's smothered exclamations induced him to start and peer more closely into his features. The intruder at the same time appeared to recognise the towsey red head of M'Sweeny—from which the hat had now tumbled—and was the first to exclaim—

"Oh, why couldn't you look before you hit out?"

"Begorra, it's Mr Middleton himself!" cried the crestfallen M'Sweeny, helping up the man he had fallen on, and obsequiously dusting his coat for him. "Who ever would thought it was you?"

Some whispered explanation followed, from which it appeared that Mr Middleton had no sooner seen his wife and children comfortably to the party than he slipped on an old cloth cap and muffler he had found in the hall and run back to have a look at his house, and, if possible, see if M'Sweeny was making any discoveries or captures of importance.

With many reproaches for all but spoiling his case, M'Sweeny hurried his employer out of the place, telling him to keep away as long as he could, or take the consequences; and, having thus diverted Mr Middleton's attention from the severe pummelling he had received, he once more turned his attention to the house. The attractive cosiness of the interior, with the slobbering about in the sleet and sludge which he had just received, had effected a slight change in M'Sweeny's feelings, and he thought he might change or modify his plans.

"I could grab him just as well in the house as outside—an' a deal better, for me fingers won't be like bunches of icicles," he muttered, after detecting a glimpse of light in the dining-room, and then slipping round to find Jeanie still busy in the kitchen. "While she's watchin' that the pie don't burn itself, and the praties don't boil over, it'll be aisy for me to slip in at the front dure."

The wish for warmth goaded him to instant action, and in a moment or two more he had noiselessly slipped back the check-lock of the front door, entered the warm lobby, and snuffed long and ecstatically at the appetising odour streaming through it from the direction of the kitchen. Then, after pulling off his boots and hiding them under the lobby-stand, he stole into the dining-room, saw that the glittering tea things were arranged on a small table in front of a glorious fire, and then, hearing a light step in the lobby, he hastily scrambled in below the sofa, and had only got comfortably out of sight when Jeanie appeared with a plate of cake, which she unsuspectingly added to the tempting array on the tea-table, blithely singing the while, "Oh, Charlie is my darling."

"Musha, thin, I wish I was Charlie," muttered M'Sweeny. "Jeanie's lips look as if they wor meant only for kissing, and her pastry and pie crust—em! ah!—would melt the heart ov any man, if he only smelt it a mile off."

A heavy breath, or the gulping down of the deluge of water that had rushed to M'Sweeny's mouth, had startled the girl, for she dropped a teaspoon clatter among tea-cups, and exclaimed—

"S—s—sh! what's that?" turning at the same time right round on her toes, as the hidden watcher could see, to examine every corner of the room.

Fortunately, the moment she became thus startled into breathless silence, a low tap sounded on the kitchen door at the back, and with a joyous cry of relief Jeanie sped from the room to admit her lover. Her returning footsteps were accompanied by other two from a pair of heavy boots, and were not nearly so swift, being mingled, during the entire passage to the dining-room, with the explosion of many kisses—every one of which made M'Sweeny's mouth water worse than a whole ovenful of pastry would have done. When the pair came in sight, M'Sweeny could see only the skirts of Jeanie's spotless print gown and the lower half of a pair of check tweed trousers, one leg of which had a square patch inserted at the ancle. The trousers and heavy boots, after much rebuke from Jeanie, at length anchored themselves on a chair close to M'Sweeny. There was no reason why my chum should not at once have pounced on him, the more so as Jeanie left the room to bring the tea. M'Sweeny has always declared that his reason for delaying was to learn from the conversation what kind of character "Charlie" was, and to discover if he had any

connection with the robberies; but I suspect that the real reason was a kind of sympathising wish to let the poor fellow enjoy a little of the transient bliss before lugging him off to the cells. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind; and they had not yet begun to demolish the dainties.

As soon as the teapot was brought in and put under the cosy, there was another chase and capture, followed by as many explosive kisses as would have scared a volunteer general into the idea of a terrific battle. Most persons require a whole chair to themselves, but that in front of M'Sweeny held Charlie and Jeanie comfortably, and neither complained of want of room. Love is said to be eloquent, but the only words uttered by Charlie were—

“Oh, Jeanie, but ye're a bonnie lass!” and “I'm no wantin' tea—I'm only wanting anither kiss.”

It was Jeanie who did most of the chatting, and her words ranged over a vast field, including the cost of marriage, of furnishing a house, and speculative remarks as to whether a plumber's wage would be sufficient to support the expense of a ten pound rent. From all this M'Sweeny gleaned much regarding Charlie, but nothing of the robbery. At last even Charlie became somewhat satiated of mere kissing and enthusiastic demonstration, and the first cup of tea was poured out and consumed, as well as the beautiful puff-cake which M'Sweeny, I suspect, had fondly expected to taste. Then M'Sweeny prepared for action.

“I'd drop on him now, only I'm afeard for the girl,” he dubiously muttered. “She'll scream, an' mebbe scratch like a tiger, and it won't be *him* that'll get the benefit of her nails.”

At length Jeanie rose and left the room to refill the teapot; and M'Sweeny, with the handcuffs ready in his teeth, suddenly put out a paw and gripped the horrified plumber by the ankle. The effect was more disastrous than either had anticipated, for with a loud cry of terror Charlie sprang up, grasping at the tablecloth with both hands to save himself from being pulled down. The table itself was smooth as glass, and held on its surface not only the beautiful tea set and tray, but the great massive lamp of pink china which lighted the whole room. Tablecloth and everything on it came away with Charlie's hands, and, with a crash that brought an answering scream from Jeanie, the whole room became dark, and the two men were madly fighting, and struggling, and rolling over and over among the wreck on the carpet. M'Sweeny, though his

first intention was only to cling fast to his prisoner, fought well, and succeeded in effectually "marking his man for identification," by giving him a tremendous "oner" on the right eye; but just as he was getting the upper hand, Jeanie ran screaming into the room with the newly filled teapot in her hand. The room was darkened by the smashing and extinguishing of the lamp; but there was still sufficient light from the fire to enable her to distinguish between a towsy head of flaming red hair and the brown locks of her beloved Charlie. Without a moment's hesitation, she brought the teapot smash down on the offending red head, breaking the pot into fragments, and bringing its scalding contents down about M'Sweeny's ears, and neck, and face.

For a moment or two my chum was too busy with one of the sofa cushions getting the hot water out of his hair, and feeling gingerly at his scalded ears, to think of either prisoner or assailant, and when he did recover sufficiently he found Charlie gone. Jeanie was there though, in tears and anger, to listen to his explanation that he was a detective sent to investigate in regard to the missing articles, but not to believe it. She told him roundly that neither Charlie, who was a relation of hers, nor herself were thieves, and that all she had given her lover was bought with her own money, and finally refused blankly to give Charlie's name or address, and not very gently bundled M'Sweeny out into the sleet and wind to cool his ears and his brain at one and the same time.

When Mr Middleton and his wife returned they found the wreck cleared away, but were told by the indignant Jeanie that a horrid man calling himself a detective, who had smuggled himself into the dining-room, had clumsily smashed the lamp; and then Jeanie waxed so warm in her reproaches at being suspected, that Mr Middleton began to faintly ask himself if he or she was the injured person. As she admitted having a friend in to tea with her, however, he would have discharged her on the spot; but it happened that Mrs Middleton sided strongly with the girl, and so after much altercation it was arranged that she should be allowed to stay till the term.

M'Sweeny, after spending a restless night with an oily rag round his ears and neck, had his plans all cut and dry. He first visited Mr Middleton, and discovered that some plumbers had been employed about the house some months before, and, getting the name of the firm who sent them, he went to the workshop and asked coolly "If Charlie was in?"

Charlie was in; and M'Sweeny, though he could not swear to the face, identified him at once by the black eye he had given him and the square patch in his check tweed trousers. But what added to his exultation was to find the prisoner wearing on his little finger a ring of solid gold, set with a beautiful blood-stone. Charlie protested loudly that the ring was his own, but could not give any clear account as to how it came into his possession, and was marched off to the Office, where an hour or two after Mr Middleton appeared, and swore positively that the blood-stone ring was that which had been stolen from him. Strict search was made in Charlie's lodgings, but no trace of any of the other stolen articles was discovered. The ring, however, bore all before it. If he had been able to say how or where he got it, perhaps his case would have been dismissed; as it was, he was remitted to the Sheriff Court, and there, in spite of every protest of innocence, sentenced to a month's imprisonment. My own opinion was then, and now is, that the ring he was convicted of stealing had in reality been *found*, and that he was afraid that to confess the truth would not avert punishment, as he had committed a crime in not reporting the find to the police and delivering up the article to our keeping. He was unknown to the police, and said to be a hard-working fellow, though somewhat hare-brained, and so the sentence was made light.

I have hinted thus that, in spite of M'Sweeny's cleverness in capturing and identifying him, Charlie was not the thief; though M'Sweeny to this day scouts at my explanation, and hints only too plainly that it has been concocted out of my own imagination. The real truth only came to my knowledge many years after, and then through the person principally concerned, Mr Middleton, and long after Charlie had been drifted out of my ken.

Not a month after the conviction of M'Sweeny's prisoner, Mr Middleton chanced to be up in one of the bedrooms in the attics, when his attention was attracted by a tiny voice in some invisible quarter crying out—

“Pa-pa! pa-pa! Tum an see my pletty housie.”

A look all round the room revealed no child, though the voice evidently belonged to the youngest of his children; but at length the sound led him to a temporary door, which had been affixed to a recess under the slates, which had been intended to hold a cistern, but had never been needed for that purpose. The door was much too low for a man to enter easily,

but by stooping he managed to get his head in, and by the light coming in at a single pane of plate-glass inserted in the slates, he saw his youngest born, and therefore much praised and pet son, squatted admiringly in front of the "pletty housie." The "housie" consisted of an old starch box, turned on its face, on which were arranged a magpie-like hoard of bright things which made Mr Middleton's eyes nearly leave their sockets.

"Pletty, pletty, papa!" cried the child, still crowing over its treasures, and clapping its hands; and then the astounded father crept in on his hands and knees, and found the missing gold watch, card case, silver spoons, and a blood-stone ring! Instinctively his eye travelled to his left hand, on which shone a ring the very counterpart of the one he had unearthed; and then, in the impulse of the moment, he shouted out—

"Jeanie! Jeanie! come here and see what I've found!"

He regretted the impulsive cry a moment after; but Jeanie, who was on the same landing making beds, ran in in a moment to see the find and hear him say—

"Well, if there isn't every one of those things that your sweetheart was sent to jail for stealing—aye, even the very ring!"

"I knew he was innocent! I told you he was, and you wouldn't believe me," cried Jeanie, with a burst of tears. "I'll go to the Office at once, and have you put in his place for false swearing."

"Hush! it was a mistake—I can't be punished for a mistake," said Mr Middleton, looking horribly crestfallen, and trying to divert her attention by wallowing well the child who had innocently caused all the mischief. "I am willing to make him and you liberal compensation if you will say nothing about it to any one."

With many tears and wringings of the hands, and protestations that she could never hear of such a thing, Jeanie at last listened, but held out so rigidly for high terms that for a time her master all but dared her to do her worst. A night's reflection brought them both to a more reasonable frame of mind, and then Jeanie consented, on payment of £20, to say nothing of the discovery, and to get Charlie to do likewise.

And did she fully implement her agreement and impatiently await the hour which should set Charlie free and restore him to her eager arms? Alas for the fickleness of womankind! Jeanie furnished a house with the twenty pounds, married the

baker who had brought round the bread a month after receiving the money, and left her former lover Charlie to languish out his term in blissful ignorance of the discovery that had taken place in his favour.

To this day he does not know the injustice he suffered at her hands, though he may now read the truth for himself.

THE WIFE-KILLER.

THE man was a sailor, I could see, but it was the expression of his face that most powerfully interested me, as he sauntered in and sat down to wait his turn in the "reception room." Blank despair was there, and that woe-begone, reckless look which I have seen dozens of times on the faces of men and women who have tried to commit suicide, and either failed or been rescued. There was also an ill-suppressed excitement affecting him, as I could see by the powerful quivering of his hands as he cut himself a bit of tobacco.

"Been having a spree and lost his money or watch, and now comes to us for help," was my mental comment, so I was in no hurry to attend to him. His first words, however, both undeceived and startled me.

"My name is Matthew Harris, and I've come to give myself up."

I stared at him, trying in vain to remember any one of that name who was "wanted."

"What for? What have you done?" I said, after a pause.

"For killing my wife. She was buried about a month ago, and I've had no rest ever since."

I thought I understood it now. The man was mad, and like many more in that unhappy condition imagined himself guilty of murder.

I took him to a quieter room, and tried to engage him in conversation till the medical inspector could be brought to examine him. But my delicacy was quite thrown away upon the self-accused sailor, who was a man of great intelligence and penetration, for he read my thoughts like a book, and promptly said—

"I know what you think. You're saying to yourself, 'Oh, here's another madman—I'll have to humour him a bit;' but you're wrong. I'm not mad, nor likely to be—I only wish I was; I'd get some kind of rest then."

"If you killed your wife, how comes it that we have heard

nothing of the crime?" I quietly remarked. "How was the thing done?"

"Oh, there's lots o' ways o' killin' folk that nobody ever dreams on," wearily returned Harris. "Nobody thought I'd harmed a hair of her head; and nobody would yet, only my conscience won't let me off. I thought, before she was gone, that if ever anybody deserved to be helped out of the world it was her, but when folks are in the grave you come to think different on 'em."

"You were unhappy, then?"

"Mortal unhappy. Nobody knows but myself what I suffered through that woman—as drunken a jade as ever crawled the earth. If I didn't know it, I couldn't believe that it was the same lass that I used to sweetheart and look forward to seeing at the end of the voyage. She was as pretty and good as any on earth then, but she took to drink after we was married—little by littles—and then it got such hold on her that she couldn't help herself. First she drank all my savings, then she drank her clothes, and then she began to drink the furniture."

"And you tried to stop it, of course?"

"Might as well have whistled for wind in a dead calm—she wouldn't be stopped; and as I was at sea most of the time, I'd no proper idea what a miserable woman she'd growed to. I thought when the child came it would pull her up a bit, but it didn't for long. I was sort o' built up on the wee thing, I will admit;—" and the man wiped the sweat from his brow rather slowly to hide something else. "It was so like what she'd been when she was pure, and young, and sweet; and, as I didn't know how it was neglected while I was away, I never took thought of evil. I was always thinking of the child when I was away, seeing that its mother was not worth thinking of now, and looked for'ard to the time when it would be a grown-up lass, able to watch its mother and keep her outen harm's way. My God! when I think of it, I sometimes feel as if she deserved to die after all."

"How? what? did she injure the child?"

"I was coming up Leith Walk, one bitter cold morning before six o'clock, when our ship had just got in, and was thinking what a nice surprise I'd give to the child when I got home. I'd a little squeaking doll in my pocket for it, and no end of sweeties I'd brought from Rotterdam. When I was half-way up Leith Walk I comes on a crowd of working men, and such like, who were gathered round a ragged little infant they'd found lying 'bout dead in the frozen gutter. It had

been left there for God knows how long—most likely all night—and was just about gone when the policeman got it and put his coat about it. I swore a bit at the unnatural father and mother that could leave such a little thing there, and went as far as the Police Station with the crowd, and then heard that the poor little thing was dead. I then went home, and found the door of my house open, but nobody at home. Then somebody told me that my wife had been took up drunk the night before. Nobody know'd anything about the child. I went to the station and found my wife, but she didn't know what she'd done with it neither. Don't know how it was, but the minute she said that, my heart went all cold and dead as a lump of lead, and I thought straight of the little thing I'd seen picked up on the street. 'If that's my little Chicky'—I used to call her that—I said to myself, 'I'll never hold up my head again.' I went down to the station-house, and got them to show me the frozen little thing. It was my little Chicky, stiff as a stone. I took out the little toys I'd brought for her, and let 'em drop on the floor—they was no use to me now. I'm not hard-hearted, but I couldn't cry—there wasn't a bit of cry in me. The men in the place seemed to take on more than me, and said some kind words which I didn't rightly hear, I was so struck to see Chicky dead. Then I took her up in my arms, and axed the loan of a coat to cover her over while I carried her to my house; and they sent a man to follow and watch me in case I should drop dead on the way. Wish't I had—wish't I had!"

"I think I remember that case," I interposed in a subdued whisper. "Your wife was tried for it, and got six months' imprisonment."

"I saw Chicky buried, and then sent word to my wife that I was done with her; that she'd get half of my pay as soon as she came out of prison, but that she and I must be same as strangers. But what's the use of saying anything or arranging anything with a woman whose brain is sodden with whisky? She wouldn't be shook off—she drank harder than ever, and followed me through the streets screaming after me, and making the crowds believe I'd killed her child—the pure little thing that she'd been in prison for killing. She'd got her whole brain turned upside down, and thought everything the opposite of what it was. Sometimes I was near killed by the mobs she raised about me; and once I was as near turning on her in the street and killing her as any one ever was without doing it—

only by accident I'd changed my clothes that morning, and hadn't my knife with me—thank God for His mercy!"

I thought it rather odd that he should be thankful for having spared her, and yet kill her after all, but I said nothing.

"You were sorely tried," I remarked, after a pause.

"I got sick of life altogether. What had I to live for?" he wearily returned. "I wished many a time, when the wind rose of a night, that it would blow me to the bottom of the sea, and often went aloft, or crossed the deck in a storm as careless as could be, hoping I'd be swept away, but death wouldn't have anything to do with me. Then I got desperate, and one night took a pan of charcoal into my bunk, saying it was horrible cold; but before I was half suffocated, our captain, who's a schoolmate of mine and likes me uncommon, came down and hunted me out, and then fines me smartly, just to hide the fact that I'd been trying to choke myself. Says he when we got into harbour, 'Mat, there's the money that'll be stopped out of your pay; but before I give it you, or let you go ashore, you'll have to promise me not to try suicide again.' 'Who said it was suicide?' I said, sort of bold like; but he only shook his head sad like, and gripped me by the hand, and then said, 'I'm sorry for you, Mat; but don't fret about her, nor try to rob the world of such a good honest man. She's not worth it. Just have patience, and she'll drink herself to death some day, and then you'll get rid of your troubles.' I couldn't say much—I was so took round the heart by his kind way of putting it and of screening me from the men, and I made the promise right off; but somehow, when I came to think his words over, they began to stir me with a curious feeling. The devil—or something as bad as the devil—put the thought into my head, and then gave me no peace till I'd followed it out. 'She'll drink herself to death' was his words—the prompting of the *other one* was, 'Help her to do it now. Give her as much drink as she can swallow, and the thing will soon be over. She will kill herself, and no one else be to blame.' I thought it capital, and got a keg of brandy—the strongest I could buy—and had it took to the house. I found she was lying ill, having had a bad attack of the *delirium tremens*, and there was a stupid old woman looking after her in the way of nursing, as she couldn't afford a proper nurse. When I went into her room, and showed her the present I'd brought her, her eyes near jumped out of her head with joyfulness, and I could see she was fair dying to get me and the old woman out of the way, so's she might do a

burster with the brandy. I left the place all of a tremble, and couldn't get that look of hers outen my head. I knew I'd done a horrible thing, yet I hadn't strength of mind to go back and prevent it. I went back again in a day or two after and found she was dead, and the keg empty."

I did not know what rejoinder to make, and remained silent. Put before me as he had put it, it certainly looked a horrible plan; and its complete success in a manner took the breath away. Yet even while stupidly staring at him, there came to me the curious thought—Could he be held responsible for a death that was purely the act of the woman herself? That would depend entirely upon whether the woman, at the time of receiving the present, was a responsible being, and whether her medical attendant had forbidden or allowed her to use spirits at discretion.

"Of course, in a sense, you were responsible for her death," I at length observed. "You are quite sure that you did not force her to swallow the drink?"

"Quite sure of that; she needed no forcing," was the despairing reply. "I did not even see her drink it. She was so changed and wasted that I couldn't bear to look at her. When she was dead I didn't feel relieved, or happy, or free, as I had expected I would. I couldn't get her face away from me. I saw it night and day, and it wasn't the bloated face she had when she died, but sweet and fair as it was when we was sweethearts. And it wasn't reproachful or angry—I could have stood that better—it was always kind and gentle as if she was saying, 'You killed me, but I'll watch over you and see that you come to no harm.'"

"All imagination," I suggested.

"Not imagination—conscience," he wearily responded. "I'm a murderer in thought and deed—the mark of Cain is on me, and I'm done with the world, and only wanting to die and be at rest."

By this time my idea that the man was insane had vanished. He was too circumstantial and minute in his particulars, some of which I had recognised as actual facts, to be crazed. He did not wander in his statements, or say anything monstrous or absurd.

The whole told like a burning and truthful page from the book of every-day life. But, with this conviction, which was speedily confirmed by the medical inspector, came a second curious suspicion. I thought it just possible that Harris had

helped his wife away in some way that he did not care to mention. I had no reason for thinking so, I admit, and what roused the thought I cannot tell, but there it was, and there it remained.

To deal with the case as it stood was not an easy task; but as soon as Harris was pronounced sane he was locked up, while we went to search out the medical man who had attended Mrs Harris in her last illness. With some difficulty we found the doctor, and recalled to his memory the drunken wife of the sailor. The first question of importance was—

“At the time that Mrs Harris was last visited by her husband, had she perfectly recovered her reason—was she a responsible person, who could be trusted to take much or little spirits as she might think she required it?”

“Certainly; she was perfectly able to take care of herself in that respect; but I had warned her to be cautious in future, or I would not be responsible for the consequences.”

“She was nearly well, then, at that time?”

“She was so well that I expected to find her out of bed when next I called, and did not look in for two or three days. When I did call she was dead—had died that very morning, the old woman said, though she admitted that she could not tell the hour, as she had been asleep at the time.”

“Were you not astonished?”

“I was indeed, and not at the death alone, but at the appearance of the deceased. I know that she was in the habit of drinking laudanum, and would have felt certain that she had died of an overdose of that drug, but the appearance of the body belied that. The face was distorted, and the hands clenched as in agony—quite unlike the peaceful repose of laudanum poisoning.”

“Did you not make any examination or inquiry?”

“I wished to do so, but the husband objected when he was sent for.”

“Then how did you report the death?”

“I reported it as ‘Of uncertain seat—Intemperance.’”

“And yet you thought she had been poisoned?”

“At first I thought that possible, but then changed my mind. The appearances were more like those of convulsions, or the agony of an irritant poison, than those of laudanum. There was an empty laudanum phial lying in front of the bed—a two-ounce bottle, if I remember rightly. It may have been that which suggested the idea of poisoning to my mind.”

"Did it not strike you as being a case of simple asphyxia? Such cases are common with persons addicted to heavy drinking."

"It was not that—I made sure of that whenever I learned that she was dead. I believe the woman had had little or no drink for nearly a month before her death, except the prescribed quantity ordered by me."

This answer did not tally with our own information, but we did not correct the statement. We simply had several consultations, and then got power to exhume the body of the deceased. Before this was done, however, I had a visit from the captain of Harris's vessel, accompanied by his sister, and both pleaded warmly and eloquently that Harris was a little upset by his troubles, and only blamed himself for his wife's death because he was a soft, good-hearted fellow, brimful of affection. It appeared that in his trouble Harris had always found shelter and sympathy with these friends, and so an affection almost deeper than friendship had been created between them. From the flashing glance and indignant tones of the captain's sister, Miss Philip, when speaking of the doings of the deceased, I could see that all her sympathies lay with the unfortunate seaman. This was no doubt very pleasing to witness, but it manifestly weakened their testimony in favour of Harris; and, singularly enough, while these two friends were busy accumulating evidence that Harris was in a manner temporarily insane and not to be listened to, the case was assuming a darker phase in another direction.

The body of Mary Harris, on being examined, showed unmistakable evidence that she had died from the effects of a powerful irritant poison. The coat of the stomach, indeed, was almost *burned through* by the corrosive mixture, and it was clear that death could have been brought about by but one doze of such a poison. It also seemed evident that the deceased could not have committed suicide, as she had always expressed the most lively horror of death, and had not been able to leave her bed, far less the house, to procure or swallow such a poison; the house, moreover, on being searched, revealed no trace of such a poison; and the inference was naturally that the poisoner had removed everything likely to criminate after the deed was done.

I now thought that I understood more clearly Harris's remorse and despair; and I anticipated no difficulty in drawing from him the full confession of his guilt. Imagine my surprise,

then, on hinting at these facts, when he first opened his eyes in lively horror and surprise, and then declared, with the utmost solemnity, that he at least was free from all knowledge of the crime, or complicity in the deed.

Questioned in every way, he adhered to his statement; and while admitting frankly that he had wished his wife dead, and presented her with the keg of brandy in hope of bringing about that, swore that he had never dreamed of administering an irritant poison, or of even putting such a poison within her reach. This declaration by itself would have gone for little in the face of the medical evidence; but another curious fact came out in the post-mortem examination, which seemed to undermine the most important statement in Harris's confession. This was that there were no indications of the deceased having recently indulged inordinately in brandy; indeed, all the medical testimony went to prove most emphatically that brandy was *not* the cause of the death. Here was a mystery; and as usual I was turned to with the words—

“Well, Mr M'Govan, there's some work for you. See what *you* can make of it.”

At this stage I was absolutely without a theory of any kind, though still inclined to think that Harris knew more than he would admit. But there was one point in the case which, it seemed to me, I ought to be able to clear up, though the main feature should for ever remain unsolved—that was, whither and how the brandy had so mysteriously vanished in the short space of three days. The medical evidence seemed to show that little or none of it had gone into the mouth of the deceased, yet on her death Harris had found the keg empty. Brandy is not generally allowed to evaporate—to waste its sweetness on the desert air—until part of its fire has been imparted to some dry throat or eager palate. Who, then, had swallowed this? I had already discovered that Mrs Harris's friends had in a manner taken charge of her, so far as to interdict all her neighbours from entering the house, as they were under the impression that some articles of value had in that way been stolen. They also provided a kind of attendant in the shape of an old woman, who was glad of a few shillings a week and her food to keep her out of the poor-house.

“I'll have a hunt for her,” was my first reflection. “I shouldn't wonder but she'll be a drouthy body.”

Janet Petrie had a house of her own, that is, a little garret which was sublet to her by the real tenant of the house; but I

found her room empty, and the landlady somewhat concerned about the few sticks of furniture being in the way of her letting the room. Janet was "away," she said; but on inquiring more sharply what that meant, I received the mysterious but significant reply—

"Oh—Number Ten."

I understood at once—the Ward in the Infirmary allotted to patients suffering from *delirium tremens*.

"She has been drinking, then?" I said, with apparent indifference.

"Oh, ay; she had her box there filled wi' bottles o' brandy; and when she cam' hame she jist set to and drank and drank till she drank hersel' daft and the bottles toom, and then we had to pack her aff to Number Ten."

I had a suspicion that the woman who tendered this information had herself taken an active part in the "tooming" of the bottles, but said nothing, and went out to Number Ten, where I found old Janet Petrie in her right mind, but very weak. Indeed, her first words in answer to me gave me hope of finding her both pliable and truthful in her answers.

"I'm near deid, that's a fact. I dinna ken if I'll ever get better," she said. "Ser'd me richt for takin' what wasna my ain."

"What did ye tak', wuman?" I asked, with a smile.

"A wee drap brandy. I was nursing a puir body that had nae need for it—it wad jist have dune her herm—so I filled a bottle oot o' the keg and took it hame."

"Only ae bottle?" I banteringly inquired.

"Weel, weel—maybe twa."

"Hout, wuman, ye may as weel tell the truth," I lightly returned. "Did ye tak' a' the brandy, or only a part o't?"

"Oh, weel, I didna leave muckle o't," was the slow answer. "I wad have been better withoot it. 'Od, it set me fair daft; I dinna mind o' them bringing me in here."

"Ay, Janet, my wuman, that's a geyan common experience," said I, with a laugh at her solemnly puckered face and lips. "But they're saying that Mrs Harris didna come to her death by fair means, and her man will hae to stand his trial sune for that very crime."

The face of the old woman, as I gave her this news, underwent some remarkable changes, and in her surprise and excitement she actually had strength enough to rise and sit up in bed.

"Then the puir man is innocent; I can prove that!" she exclaimed, with great eagerness.

"But he says he's guilty," said I in return. "He says he gied her the brandy in the hope that she would drink herself deid, and she did it."

"The brandy?" retorted the old woman, with a pucker of the lips. "There was never a drap o't gaed doon her throat—I wish there had—I wad maybe no been here the noo."

"Ay, but there's mair than that," I continued; "for Mrs Harris's body has been lifted, and it's quite certain that she was poisoned."

A scared and blanched look crept over the old woman's face, and for a moment she could not speak.

"And will he—will he be hanged for that?" she at length faintly stammered.

"Yes, if he is found guilty."

"But he couldna have poisoned her—he was never near her but ance, and that was when he brought her the brandy," tremulously continued the old woman. "I *ken* he didna dae't; surely my word sud gang for something?"

"Then how did the poison get into her stomach?" I curiously inquired, pretty sure that something was behind all the excitement and flutter.

"Wad the body be hanged that put it in her road?" cautiously inquired the old woman after a long pause.

"Certainly, if it was done with the intention of taking her life," I decidedly answered.

"But if it was an accident?" persisted the trembling woman. "There's mony an accident happens, and naebody to blame."

"True, but how could an accident happen? You had charge of the woman, and surely you took care that she should get nothing in the shape of poison?"

"It wasna my faut," tremulously answered the old woman, wringing her hands and getting unnerved. "I tell't her what was in the bottle, and she said she wud mind, and what mair could I dae?"

"Tell us about that, Janet, and I'm sure if it was an accident naebody will blame you."

"Weel, the plain truth is that Mrs Harris, wi' lying whiles on the cauld grund, or daidling aboot on weet nichts half-fou, had got her body filled wi' rheumatic pains, and she got me to get her a bottle o' liniment that had dune me guid withoot letting on to the doctor. It was marked 'Poison—for external use

only,' and a very guid liniment it was. I used to pit it on for her, and we had used near the hale bottle, when ae day I wanted a biggish bottle to bring her some lime-water in. There was just a wee drappie in it, but I didna like to waste it, so I put it in an empty laudanum bottle that stood on the chair at her bedside. She was looking at me daein' it, and I said to her, 'Mind an' no drink this by mistake,' and she said, 'I'll mind.' I took the liniment bottle and got it filled wi' lime-water, after I had washed it oot very particularly; but she never needed the lime-water after a'. I slept raither sound that nicht, and in the morning wondered at her lying sae quiet; and then, when I lookit closer, I saw she was deid, an' a' crunkled up as if she had dee'd in pain. The laudanum bottle that the liniment had been in was lying on the bed pane empty, and she was stiff. I think she had waukened in the nicht in a half-donnert state, and forgotten about the laudanum bein' dune and the liniment being in its place, and taken a pu' at the bottle, as she often did when she wanted to sleep. I was awfu' feared, and I washed oot the bottle very carefully afore I sent for the doctor."

"And where were you at the time that she died?"

"Sleeping at the fireside in a chair."

"Were you drunk the night before?"

"No me; I had had a guid drappie, but I was jist fair worn oot wi' want o' sleep."

"And you heard no cry nor noise during the night?"

"No a cheep."

I began to see through the strange case now, but did not accept at once the statement of Janet Petrie. I sifted it to its core, and found it confirmed in its curious details by various facts and witnesses, until I was prepared to put the whole case as she had stated it before my superiors. Mrs Petrie was soon sufficiently recovered to bear removal to the police cells, and she then gave other facts and evidence confirmatory of her first statement; and from these it was made all but certain that the miserable woman had been poisoned by accidentally swallowing a poisonous liniment. Poor Harris, when the matter was explained to him, could hardly believe his senses, and seemed like a man suddenly pulled back from death to life. His wife was dead, but *he* had not caused that death—that was where the joyous relief came in; and shortly after, when his captain came to conduct him from prison to his own home, I heard him say as their hands met—

"No more suicides, or repining, or bad thoughts now, Jim! I'm going to begin life anew."

Harris is now brother-in-law to his own captain, and I believe is as happy as any man afloat. Janet Petrie was detained for about a week, and then discharged with a severe reprimand.

SELF EXECUTIONERS.

SEVEN years make a wonderful difference on most of us—not only in our appearance, but our sentiments. Time seems to rub the corners off us, smooth out the furrows of hate, and in some cases replace them by the softer lines of friendship, affection, or love. At one part of our lives some one injures us, and we vow vengeance on him the first time he shall come within our reach. Years pass; the hot rage evaporates; we look upon him first with indifference, then with a pitying smile at his shallow cunning or treachery, and then possibly with a tinge of admiration.

“Slotty,” otherwise Mr Pete Brimmer, and his friend “Sheffield Blade,” otherwise Mr Robert Nailer, parted for their respective sentences of Ten Years, as recorded in “Larks,” with the worst possible feeling towards each other. Slotty was enraged at having stupidly used his tobacco knife on the wrong man; and the “Blade” was enraged on the principle that the injurer is always the aggrieved person, and because he erroneously blamed Slotty for his arrest and conviction. Had they but been allowed ten minutes for friendly intercourse in a quiet cell, with their paws unfastened, and the merest stump of a tobacco knife each, I have no doubt that the country would have been saved a considerable sum, even allowing for a couple of convicts’ funerals. It would also have saved me a great deal of trouble and hard work; but only a select few earn their pay without working for it, and from that class I have hitherto been rigidly excluded.

Slotty and Sheffield Blade being professional criminals and old jail birds, at once settled down into the old groove, and became well-behaved convicts, penitent and pious to a fault before the chaplain, and humbly obsequious to warders and turnkeys, and so earned their full share of marks; while I have no doubt many a wretched amateur of a criminal, in for scribbling down some name that was not legally his own, would be rebelling hotly at petty tyrannies or gross outrages, and be thus compelled to serve his full term.

The fact that both convicts, though separated by a county or two, had pursued the same virtuous practice, was testified by them being set at liberty within a few days of each other. Both were human, however, and both had had time to cool down and reflect; and, when they met in Edinburgh, instead of grabbing madly at the nearest weapon, they all but embraced, and spent the first few days of their liberty in friendly carousal. "When criminals unite, let honest folk tremble," says the thieves' proverb in its own peculiar language; and I had no sooner noted the renewed friendship of the old enemies than I said to some one, "There will be work on our hands before long, unless we manage to nip up one of these rascals soon." And I was right. "Sheffield Blade" had as much cunning and planning power as would have stocked a half-dozen criminals; Slotty had determination and endurance for the same number; so what could be expected from the new league but a case as puzzling as it was difficult to unravel? Besides, as I have frequently had to show, an odd chance incident often steps into a case to upset the nicest calculations, and as one appeared in this, it thus, added to the number, puzzled the criminals themselves.

One afternoon a gaudily dressed young girl stepped into a jeweller's shop over in the New Town, bearing in her hand a common silver brooch wanting the pin. But a moment or two before her entrance, two things had happened which had some influence upon the things which followed. The first was that Mr Fairley, the jeweller, had left the shop to go home for dinner, and the second was that a girl had gone into the shop with a basket containing the shopman's "tea." The shopman was thus busy in the back-room over this meal when the young woman entered. The two places were separated by a partition and a door, the upper half of which was filled with obscured glass in lieu of panels. At the moment that the bell of the outer glass door sounded, the shopman was seated with his back to the door of the inner room, and, as he was in the act of swallowing a bite, did not rise instantly to go to the front. When he did appear behind the counter, the girl simply showed him the brooch, said she wanted a new pin put into it, and asked how soon it was possible to do the trifling job. A time being fixed, her name was taken down and a printed ticket handed to her, and then she left the shop, while the man returned and finished his meal without further interruption.

All this was such a simple and every-day occurrence—not

excepting the apparent character of the customer—that the man thought no more of the circumstance, and certainly never dreamed of connecting it with what followed. He did not mention it to me or any one, and, if he had, it is scarcely possible that I should have gleaned anything from the statement.

Three or four hours later the shop was closed as usual, and that means that it was made almost impregnable to burglars. At that time the open slots in doors and shutters, with lights left burning in the shops, had not been adopted; but this particular shop, though the stock was not very large, was so well protected, that several attempts to break into it had failed miserably. The back windows were not only heavily barred without, but secured within by steel-lined shutters, the front shop was as firmly secured, and the workshop was below the whole, and accessible only from the shop above.

By a fortunate stroke of luck most of the jewellery had that night been taken from the windows and show-cases, and consigned to iron safes in the back part of the shop; but still enough was left both in the shop and the workshop to afford decent pickings for any one able to gain entrance.

Next morning, when the shop was opened as usual by the shopman already mentioned, in company with the foreman jeweller, there were some signs of confusion and disorder to which their eyes were not accustomed. A number of plated articles were lying on the floor behind the counter, as if they had been disdainfully tossed down by thieves intent on purer metal; some trays of small articles which had not been consigned to the safes had been tumbled out on the counter, and hurriedly weeded of their best contents. With the first glance at the place the shopman exclaimed—

“There’s surely not been a robbery? Shut the door, Jim, and put your back against it, till I have a look round.”

This clear-headed suggestion was promptly acted upon, and the shopman soon returned from below with the news that the place had been broken into, and about a dozen watches, more or less valuable, which had been sent in to repair, had been taken, as well as other articles, to the value of about £180 altogether. There were also distinct traces of skeleton keys having been tried on the iron safes, but without effect. Strange to say, there were no marks as of the powerful crowbars generally used on such occasions on hinges and locks. But the greatest wonder was to come.

The man, in his hurried exclamation, had said that the place had been "broken into;" but a close examination of the whole shop, back and front, and above and below, revealed no trace of any breakage whatever of wall, door, plaster, roof, or floor. The thieves had evidently been in, but how had they got in and out again? That was what puzzled the two first discoverers of the crime, and what continued to puzzle us as soon as we were summoned to examine the premises. I could discover no misplaced bolt or tampered lock; no gap in ceiling or floor; no means of either entrance or exit; yet there were the evidences of their presence patent to every eye. In my suspicion I even examined the chimneys of shop and workshop, only to find that they were secured by being each crossed by a strong iron bar, which no burglar could have removed except with incredible exertion.

To say that I was staggered and puzzled by the case does not convey a full idea of my feelings. I was completely upset and brought to a stand-still, and may truthfully admit that I never once thought of either Sheffield Blade or Slotty as the active hands in the job.

After a diligent examination of every inch of the shop—including every safe, and case, and shelf—I came to the conclusion that the place had been entered in the usual way, by using the keys of the place, or fabricated duplicates of those keys. This idea was utterly fallacious, but it is as well to notice it, as it led to a great deal of sifting and searching, for which I had nothing to show. Warned by my experience in another case, I tried to discover some means by which the keys of the place might have been got out of Mr Fairley's possession; and finding that they had positively never been out of his hands even for a minute, I was forced to suspect the man who generally called for them in the morning and opened the shop. The man had already plainly told me that he knew he would be suspected, and altogether conducted himself so like an innocent man that I was brought to this conclusion only with the greatest reluctance, a feeling in which his employer warmly joined. This, however, did not prevent me from arresting the man and searching his house, as well as making strict inquiry into all his connections and his actions before the robbery. All this active work on my part produced nothing. We found no trace of the stolen articles, no trace of the thieves, and no evidence that the keys had been copied or used in any way. These facts are not very creditable to me, but I give

them to show that a detective is not omnipotent. To show, indeed, how grievously I was blundering, and what a simple matter would have put me right, I will here go back and give the facts of the case as they were afterwards revealed.

When the girl entered the shop with her brooch to mend, she did not enter alone, but had by her side the Sheffield Blade himself. The moment they were within, and while the girl was in the act of closing the door, the Blade squatted down on his knees between her and the door, and close to the outside of the broad counter. When the brooch business had been arranged the girl left the shop, closing the door after her, and leaving the Blade still squatting close in in front of the counter, and therefore invisible to the shopman. When the shopman returned to the back-room to finish his interrupted meal, the Blade wriggled across the floor—still on his hands and knees, and therefore *below* the line of the window in the door of the back-room—towards a big show-case facing the counter. This case was fully ten feet long, and was fitted with six doors—three below of panelled wood, and three above of plate glass. The upper half was fitted with mahogany shelves, which were covered with plated goods; the lower half was a kind of cabinet, which was stuffed principally with patterns and odds and ends necessary to the trade, but not needed for display. Noiselessly opening one of these lower doors, the Blade wriggled himself into the bottom half of the case feet foremost, cursing under his breath the noise made by his feet among some brown paper at the other end of the case, and then as coolly drawing close the door behind him. This daring scheme was as near being detected at the very outset as any scheme ever was. The inside of the door had no handle or protuberance of any kind, and even by digging his nails into the edge of one of the panels the Blade could not effectually close it. He got the door close, but could not get it “snecked,” though he fought till the very sweat oozed from his short-cut scalp. This was a simple difficulty which was entirely unforeseen, and the Blade in the despair of the moment expected nothing less than instant detection, and a return to the penal servitude he had just quitted. Yet even here a singular chance saved him. About twenty minutes passed, and then he heard the shopman open the glass door of the back-room, and show out the child who had brought him the tea. As soon as he had done so the eye of the shopman fell on the unfastened door of the case. The Blade heard him pause in front of it, and gave himself up

for lost ; but all the man did was to put down his hand, grasp the handle of the door, and shut it with a sharp bang, without once dreaming of looking within, or trying to account for it being unfastened. Another curious chance saved the Blade later in the evening, for Mr Fairley audibly told the shopman to "look in the bottom of the big case" for something, and a moment after countermanded the order by saying that the pattern had been taken downstairs the day before.

As soon as the shop was vacated and locked up for the night, Sheffield Blade, with a long sigh of relief, crawled out of his hiding-place, rubbed his cramped limbs, and then seated himself comfortably on one of the high counter chairs, and supped heartily off some bread and cheese with which he had provided himself. Then he explored the shop; cursed a great deal, especially at the inventors of iron safes; and then gathered together as much of the stray jewellery as was worth carrying away.

All that he said must remain unrecorded, but as his disappointment at the locking away of the most of the jewellery was keen, the talking must have been both lively and energetic. He had a decent-sized pile, it is true, but nothing like what he considered a fair reward for such risk and ingenious planning.

But seeing that the cunning robber was hermetically sealed up with the valuables, it may be thought that he was reckoning a little too fast. Of what use would the whole treasures of the Bank of England be to a thief who was as safely locked up as its gold? Let us see. The Sheffield Blade had little hope of getting out of prison easily, but he had made some provision for the plunder. In a recess in the back part of the establishment was a closet having one deep, square window—that is, a hole through the wall, two and a-half feet deep and nine inches square, strongly guarded by one solid bar of iron, sunk deep into the stones. By thrusting his arm up to the socket in this curious little window, the Blade could just show his dirty paw outside and no more. He could telegraph, and grip, and motion, but could at the same time see nothing; added to which was the slight drawback that no article above four and a-half inches in breadth could be passed out.

Punctually at twelve o'clock, by the jeweller's regulator clock, the Sheffield Blade adjourned to the closet, and, sinking his arm to the socket, wagged a signal in the darkness of the common green behind. There was a prompt response—the answer of his faithful friend Slotty being the quick thrusting into his

fingers of a half-mutchkin bottle of whisky, which he drew in and applied in a luxurious long draw to his lips. This done, he took a gold watch from his pile, and thrusting his arm up to the socket as before, wagged it as a signal. Strange to say, there was no response. He wagged again impatiently and incredulously, as much as to say, "What! will nobody have a beautiful gold watch, only slightly out of repair?" He wagged indeed till he was tired, but there being no answer he was forced to draw in the prize—cursing much in a suppressed voice as he did so. After a pause he again thrust out his hand and signalled, when his paw was at once grasped in the unmistakable thieves' grip. He then tried the watch again; it was deftly removed; and so he continued passing out the plunder till the whole pile was gone. He then signalled that he meant to hand out no more, and returned to the adjoining room to exercise his skill in vain upon the locks of the safes. There were abundance of hammers and wedges in the workshop below, but he hesitated to use them on account of the noise, and would have given anything for a strong crowbar, which he had neither been able to bring with him nor thought of asking Slotty to pass into him. The few skeleton keys he carried with him were feeble and useless; so after an hour or two's hard work he gave up the task, and proceeded—not to break out of the building, which was impossible, but to prepare for the rest he had so industriously earned.

The sweetest happiness we can enjoy upon earth is to look back on hard work successfully accomplished. Had the Blade, then, not the surest guarantee of a sound sleep? Everything soft in the shape of paper and workmen's jackets and aprons he collected and conveyed to his sleeping place, which was—where do you think? The case which had hidden him was surmounted by a broad and deep cornice of mahogany, much like that which crowns the most of bookcases, and behind that was a proportionately roomy hollow or recess, nine inches deep, ten feet long, and more than a foot broad. This elevated perch, indeed, could not have suited him better had it been made and planned for his reception. Peacefully the hard-working Sheffield Blade laid his head on his pillow of stolen coats and slumbered till morning, till the very inserting of the key in the front door by the shopman.

During all the alarm and shouts of discovery, the Blade lay listening with the most lively interest, not unmingled with concern for himself. And when I appeared, and began at one end

of the place and ended my search at the other, he all but gave himself up for lost. I even, it seems, stood up on a chair to examine *the top shelf* of the case, little dreaming that a few inches higher would have revealed the reclining form of the Blade to my eyes. To look back on the oversight seems idiotically stupid, I admit; but at the time I was not thinking of the thief actually being on the premises, having all but decided that the job was the work of an amateur, not a professional criminal. I completed my examination and left the place, and then the Blade began to look out for an opportunity of leaving his perch. He had fully expected to get such a chance in the course of the day, but the stir and excitement of the robbery brought too many into the shop, and night found him still imprisoned, half famished, and beginning to get seriously concerned. After the shop was shut up, he ventured down, and signalled several times through the closet window, and at last was rewarded by having a parcel of bread and beef, and the indispensable whisky, thrust into his hand by the faithful Slotty. It is possible that Slotty—who had learned a little writing and reading in prison—might have conveyed to the Blade at the same time some written message, but the Blade had not made good use of his various sentences, and could neither read nor write. After another night's rest on the top of the case, the Blade, now grown desperate, resolved to get out at whatever risk. The shop was opened as usual, except that Mr Fairley, who had had new locks put on the door, accompanied his men; and then when the foreman was below, and the shopman and his employer at the back, the Blade was left for a moment with no one in the front shop but an old woman who was busy scrubbing up the floor in front of the counter. By and by this woman worked her way back and round the end of the counter till she was stooping behind; then with a quick scramble and drop, the Blade got down at the end of the cornice next to the door. The sound was instantly heard by the old woman, who looked up with a start, when the Blade nodded cheerfully and said, as he laid his hand on the door latch—

“Nice morning, isn't it?”

He then vanished from the shop, shutting the door so softly that no one heard him go; and having disarmed the woman's suspicions so effectively that she never once spoke of having seen him, and imagined all along that he was one of the working jewellers employed below.

Sheffield Blade was probably elated and happy at what he considered the culmination of success; but if so, his joy was brief. He made his way straight to the den of Slotty, whom he found alone—his spouse being then in prison. Slotty was all joy at seeing him, and hastened to prepare breakfast, and then rather puzzled his guest by saying—

“And where’s the swag?”

“What?”

“Where’s the swag?” repeated Slotty. “Where did you stow it?”

“Stow it? I didn’t stow it anywhere; I handed it to you through the little winder.”

“That’ll do for you!” said Slotty, with a knowing smile. “Come on now—no gammon; what did you do with it?”

There was a horrible pause, during which each thought the darkest things of his beloved pal, not unmingled with suggestive recollections of the past.

“Do you mean to tell me you didn’t get it all through the winder?” said Sheffield Blade, getting livid with passion, and speaking with unnatural slowness and distinctness.

“I mean just that. Soon as I tipped you the bottle I heard a noise behind, and saw a man look out of a stable loft behind the green, and making sure it was a peg, I bolted.

Sheffield Blade said nothing, but got out from the back lining of his coat a leaden-headed “neddy,” which he had the reputation of being able to use, and Slotty instantly saw that something was wrong, and apprehensively fumbled for his tobacco knife.

“You think to do me wi’ that miserable story?” breathed the Sheffield Blade, with deadly distinctness.

“Strike me dead if I’m not telling the truth,” cried Slotty, in earnest protest. Then a sudden light appeared to dawn on him also, and he opened his knife with energy, hissing out the words, “Oh! that’s your little game, to do me out of my share? Say you handed it to me through the winder, and kick up a row, all for sake of appearances! Oho! thought because you done me wunst afore, and got me ten years, you’ll do me again, eh? I’ll just settle up now for this and old scores as well.”

Sheffield Blade seemed to have no objections. The ruse of Slotty to appropriate the whole of the plunder was too transparent, he thought, to pass for a moment for the truth, and he acutely set the whole down to chagrin at having agreed that the Blade’s share was to be three-fourths and Slotty’s only one

quarter of the entire proceeds. The table was between them, or he would have used his neddy there and then, but instead he only turned up the cuff of his right sleeve, saying—

“Once for all, will you deliver up fair and square or not?”

The reply of Slotty was to snatch up a teapot and hurl it in the face of the Blade, who instantly delivered a terrific blow at Slotty’s head, which was as deftly evaded as had been the teapot. Then they slowly circled the table—the one with his tobacco knife, and the other grasping his neddy, till at last Slotty made a dart forward, and made a beautiful slash at Sheffield Blade’s arm.

The dig of the knife and the spurting of the blood roused the Blade into action, and he hurled himself across the table at his wiry opponent, bringing the neddy crash down on his head and shoulder. The rest was easy, for Slotty dropped at once—the tobacco knife rolling across the floor from his nerveless grasp, and then the Sneffield Blade had everything his own way. He did his work as effectually as if he had been a paid executioner employed by Government to rid the world of a pest, and shortly after walked out of the place unchallenged, leaving Slotty in a state of insensibility from a fractured skull, from which he never recovered.

Slotty was found thus by some one and carried to hospital, but as no one had been seen near the place, no one was blamed or sought for. No one was at Slotty’s funeral, so there could be no tears shed, and nothing but smiles of satisfaction from all he had troubled during his life greeted the cheerful announcement that he was at last beneath the turf.

Sheffield Blade, however, could not get rid of the idea that he was being pursued, and at once got into hiding, the place of safety selected being fortunately a hole beneath the floor of a condemned land, and immediately above a common sewer which had providentially become interrupted in its flow. The consequences might easily be foreseen.

Breathing the horrible air of this hole for some days—eating in it and sleeping in it—he imbibed enough poison to have killed a whole colony of criminals. At the end of the week he felt so bad that he crawled out and said he didn’t feel well. He was taken to the Infirmary all but insensible, and it was then found to be a case of malignant typhoid. Sheffield Blade lingered just long enough to rave out most of the facts I have put down, and then I had a search in one of the stables im-

mediately behind the jeweller's shop, resulting in the discovery of a hide in the loft containing most of the stolen articles.

A groom who kept the keys of this place strongly denied all knowledge of the robbery; but when we found one of the stolen articles in his possession, and two more in his home, he admitted having been in the green on the night of the robbery, whence he had seen a man escape in a scared manner, and having had the articles handed out by some one whom he had never seen or heard of. This story, which I now believe to be strictly true, seemed so utterly absurd to judge and jury when he came to be tried, that they unanimously found him guilty of housebreaking and reset, and awarded him the full penalty of seven years' penal servitude. Who after that will say that a penniless thief like Sheffield Blade cannot bestow a legacy on another?

The gradual revelation of the facts of the case was a sweet morsel to M'Sweeny, especially that part where I was within a few inches of the real robber without ever suspecting it; and to this day, when I have been puzzled, he will give me a dig in the ribs, and say suggestively—

“Och, Jamie, avick—why didn't ye look on the top of the glass case?”

AILEEN O'REILLY'S TASK.

LITTLE AILEEN had slipped into the "reception room" without any one noticing her in the general bustle, and, sitting down while we were noting the particulars of other cases, leant her head on the wall and in sheer exhaustion fell sound asleep. When the room was at last cleared of the noisy crowd, I noticed the solitary, sleeping child, and approached her in curiosity. She was not pretty—her face was too pinched and bloodless for that—and her clothes were the scantiest and poorest that would hold together without degenerating into actual rags. Her feet were bare, and here and there encrusted with blood, which had oozed from cuts made by the cruel stones on the weary roads over which she had passed. The child was certainly not above nine years, and thin as a shadow. A scrap of a shawl covered her shoulders, and under one of the corners of this her right hand, even in her sleep, was clenched firmly on something concealed under the breast of her frock. The big toe of the right foot had been bound up with a bit of cotton; but this had dropped off in her sleep, showing that the skin in front of the toe, by some unwary step, had been knocked off, and had bled freely.

We gathered round the strange little waif in hushed silence, no one feeling inclined to break that heavy slumber, and each silently speculating on the cause of her presence.

The little face was haggard with care, and there were deep lines in it which are happily rare with those four times her age.

At length, in curiosity, I raised the corner of the shawl covering her right hand, and, noticing the clenched grip on the bosom of her dress, pressed the spot lightly with the point of my finger. There was a slight crackle in response, and I was about to say that her jealously guarded treasure seemed to be a letter, when the child started and woke, revealing a pair of great lustrous blue eyes, which quite altered the character of her whole face.

At first she seemed slightly scared by the surrounding faces,

but as she started to her feet and curtsyed low, her eye fell upon me, when she brightened and said—

“Plase, sur, I’m Aileen O’Reilly, and I’ve come to see you to get my father out of jail.”

She smiled so sweetly that it was evident she expected that I knew all about her, which was far from being the case. I nodded in a friendly way to put her at her ease, and then said quietly—“Did I see you before, Aileen?”

“I don’t know, sur, but I saw you when my father was tried, and you said you thought he was innocent. Don’t you remember it, sur? His name is Tim O’Reilly.”

I did not remember it, but the name did seem a little familiar.

“And they put him in jail, did they? What was it for?” I inquiringly pursued.

“They said he stole a can of oil, and bate and hurt the watchman out at the works; but it was all a lie, sur—he never done it!” cried the slender child with extraordinary vehemence and excitement.

I started, and remembered the case distinctly then. The robbery had been a common-place affair out at an oil-work near West Calder; but it was a simple incident in connection with the capture and arrest of the prisoner, O’Reilly, that had roused my interest, and called from me some such remark as the girl now repeated. The robbery had been committed at night after the closing of the works, and when all was pitch dark in the yard where the thief was surprised. The watchman, in going his rounds, had caught sight of a moving figure in one of the yards near the high outer wall; saw the figure throw something like a large can over the wall; and then rushed on it, and closed with the intruder. The man had his face covered with a red cotton handkerchief, having holes for the eyes; but the watchman was a sturdy fellow, and pitched into the thief with great vigour, till a treacherous kick in the abdomen laid him all but senseless on the ground, when the other climbed the wall and vanished with surprising swiftness. In the morning, when the man was relieved, he reported the circumstance, and then it was found that a can of the purest paraffin oil made—quite unlike the vile smelling stuff commonly used—had been stolen. There was no clue to the thief; but, on the watchman telling the story of the mauling he had given the thief, an inquiry was made as to absentees from the work.

The only man missing was a labourer named Timothy

O'Reilly, and he, on being sought out, was found to be suffering from some severe bruises about the head and a black eye, for which he himself professed to be unable to account. He had not fought or quarrelled with any one that he remembered of, though he admitted that he had been "taking a drop" the night before, but nothing like enough to obscure his faculties. He supposed he had got the injuries on the way home, and could say no more about them.

The county police, however, on being called in, searched the brick cottage inhabited by O'Reilly, and found in the back room under a bed, and covered over with coals, the identical can of oil stolen from the works. Of course the evidence was conclusive, and O'Reilly was arrested there and then, when he at once roused himself and vehemently protested his innocence.

He had been sitting at the roadside, he said, resting himself on the bank, when some one he thought came up and battered him, and he remembered no more till he found himself at home, with his wife binding up his head. All this was listened to in grave silence, and then the tearful wife realised that her husband was being taken from her, and passionately exclaimed—

"Spake it out, true and strong, that ye never stole a hap'orth in your life!"

"I never did, so help me God!" solemnly answered O'Reilly. "Take me to Father Donovan, an' I'll say it over again. Take me to Father Donovan—sure he'll spake a good word for me."

So piteous did he seem in his earnest excitement that the men waived a point, and led him in the direction of the house occupied by the Catholic priest of the district, at the door of which they were met by his reverence.

"Father Donovan!" cried O'Reilly, with clasped hands, addressing the priest in a broken and grief-stricken voice, "give me a hold of the blessed cross for one minute till I clear my soul before God! They're taking me away as a thafe and a robber!—me, that swore to me old grandfather on his death-bed that I'd never disgrace him!—me, that never robbed any man of a hap'orth!—me, that wouldn't tell a lie for untold gold!"

Quite a crowd had followed them to the spot; but there, on the open street, the moment the sacred emblem was produced by the concerned priest and placed in his hand, O'Reilly sank on his knees, placed the cross to his lips, and audibly swore his innocence before heaven.

It was this simple and affecting incident, as it was narrated when O'Reilly was brought into Edinburgh by the county men, which impressed me in his favour, and probably drew from me words to the effect that I believed him innocent, though I have no recollection of the fact. I had studied the Irish character somewhat closely—had seen it under many aspects—and I could not believe that a man, having O'Reilly's good name, would deliberately and foully perjure himself thus with the sacred emblem at his lips. Yet, but a minute or two after he had made the solemn oath, he drew from his pocket a red handkerchief, having two holes in it, exactly like that described by the watchman as having been used by the thief to mask his features. When it was examined by the police, O'Reilly loudly protested that he had never seen it before—all the handkerchiefs he possessed being spotted or patterned, and this being pure red; but the protest went for nothing, and the handkerchief was retained as evidence. To the grief of his wife and little Aileen, who had accompanied him to Edinburgh, O'Reilly was locked up, and next day remitted to the High Court on a charge of robbery with violence. Before this took place, some inquiry had been made as to O'Reilly's movements during the evening of the robbery, and the result was that an interval of three hours between his leaving a public house and reaching his home remained unaccounted for. The watchman identified him as "like the thief," but could not say more. A rumour, however, got abroad that O'Reilly had been seen during that interval near the works, carrying something bulky in a sack over his shoulder, and this rumour was at last traced to a man named Hugh Higgins, who, however, when called upon, gave his evidence with manifest reluctance. He thought that the man he saw was O'Reilly, and that he saw him take a red handkerchief hastily from his face, but he had too great a respect for the prisoner to say so, or wish him any ill. This evasion would not do, and he was forced to attend as a witness; the result being the conviction of O'Reilly, and the sharp sentence, for a first offence, of six months' imprisonment.

That briefly was the case as I remembered it; and O'Reilly was still in prison serving his term. He had protested to the last at the bar that he was the victim either of a great mistake or a great wrong, but did not directly charge Higgins with perjury.

"He never done it!" repeated the child. "An' please, sur, I've a letter here from his reverence, Father Donovan, to tell

you that he believes what I told him;" and with trembling eagerness she felt in her bosom and brought out a sealed envelope addressed to me, watching every line of my face with the most intense earnestness while I opened and read the enclosure.

The letter contained little but what she had stated; merely re-affirming what the good priest had stated at the trial, a strong belief in O'Reilly's innocence, saying that the discovery made by the bearer, Aileen O'Reilly, seemed to point to the real criminal; and requesting me to take what steps I thought best in getting at the truth.

"So you've made a discovery, have you, Aileen?" I said, as I finished. "The Father says that you've been trained to speak the truth. I suppose you wouldn't tell a lie even to set your father free?"

"Indeed, sur, an' I wouldn't, for father would curse me for it as long as I lived," she answered, with tears creeping into her eyes. "Oh, sur! I've hungered for my poor father ever since he was took, an' I've been praying all the time my mother has been ill that his name would be cleared. It's that has broke our hearts; it's not the prison, nor the starvation, nor suffering—it's my father's good name. Father Donovan has believed in us, and stuck by us, but all the rest look at us as thaves, *and it's hard to live down that.*"

"And what have you discovered?" I asked, feeling myself a little astray in her wild torrent of words.

"I've found out the man that did it!" she exclaimed, with her skinny little hands clasped on her breast in ecstasy. "I lost my way one dark night in coming home from the fields where I'd been working for mother—far away where they didn't point at me. I wandered everywhere, mighty frightened, for 'fraid I'd tumble down some ould pit, and at last I saw a light coming across the field from a shanty at the mouth of one of the pits. It's a pit that you just walk down into, so there's no engine-house at it—nothing but the little shanty where the men make up the powder cartridges that they take down to blast out the shale."

In her impulsive eagerness Aileen went much too fast for my pencil, and I had to pull her up more than once during the narration.

"Sure it was the blessed Virgin herself that showed me the light an' led me to the spot," she continued, with her heart fairly brimming over; "for when I got close to the place, and

was going to knock and ax my way home, I heard the men speaking and laughing inside, and one was the bad man who swore my father into prison—Hugh Higgins.”

“Stop a bit,” I interposed; “the men don’t work at night in the shale pits, do they?”

“No, sur—at least they weren’t working. They’d been out snaring rabbits; but the rain came on, and they had gone into the shanty till it would go off.”

“Humph! and you listened, I suppose?”

“Yes, sur.”

“And what did you hear?”

“I can’t remember it all; but at last I heard Higgins say that he would p’raps pay off the man they were talking about the way he did Tim O’Reilly.”

“Well, what else?”

“Nothing else, sur; that was all he said. The other axed how it was done and what he meant, but Higgins wouldn’t tell.”

“And then you came away?”

“I was so frightened and joyful all in a breath that I didn’t know what I was doing, and I slipped my foot on the wet ground an’ banged me head on the door I was leaning on. Then I heard the two men jump up an’ fly at the door to see who was listening, and I ran off like lightning. I never thought I could go so quick, an’ my belief is I was *carried*. The men ran after me a long way, swearing horrible, and telling me to stop or they’d shoot me, but I don’t think they had guns, for I got clean away. I mind of getting home, all ragged an’ torn with the hedges and what not, but then I fell asleep, and when I woke mother said I’d been ill. Then I minded of what I’d heard in the shanty, and told her and his reverence, and then he gave me the letter to bring to you.”

It was quite evident that Aileen believed that the letter would do the whole business, and that I would forthwith rise and give an order to some one who would place her father before her, free to depart with her in joy and triumph. I looked across at her bright face in some pity, and not sure how best to break to her my disappointment at the unsatisfactory nature of her statements.

“Are you quite sure, Aileen, that you did not *dream* all that about Higgins while you were ill?” I said at last.

“That’s just what Father Donovan axed, and I said ‘No.’ It was the fright of the men chasing me, and swearing what

they would do to me if I didn't stop that made me ill. Oh no, sur, I didn't drame it, though I've dream't often since that my father came to me an' put his arms about me neck and kissed me for setting him free. Sure, it makes me eyes wather to think of it; and many's the time I've woke crying wid thankful-ness, and wishing it wor only true;" and poor Aileen did a little crying for thankfulness there and then, leaving me more at a loss than ever.

"And you walked all the way to Edinburgh to tell me this?" I said, after a grave pause.

"Sure that's a trifle when my father's at the end of the way," said Aileen brightly. "I walked a deal funder, for I didn't like any one to know where I was going, and I went off my road and was near Glasgow before a kind woman put me right. Mother couldn't come, she's so weak and ill, but she's praying for me at home—her an' little Morty, bless him for a wee dear!—and sure a mighty big help it's been to me when the road was long."

"And you look as if you needed all the help you could get," I remarked in sympathy, glancing from her pinched face downwards to her cut feet and bruised toes.

"Yes, but that'll be all over now," she said joyfully. "Many's the time since father was took we've gone days without a bite or a sup, and even Father Donovan didn't know of it. The paiple is against givin' my mother work for 'fraid she'd steal from them. Oh, but it's been a sore time for us—everything's gone 'most but the bed; and sure if cryin' would have filled our bellies, we'd never have wanted mate."

While Aileen had been speaking I had been thinking; and the result of my thoughts, if she could have read them, would have sent down her hopes as low as they were high. The more I thought over the circumstances, the more was I inclined to believe the remark of Higgins overheard by Aileen to be a mere idle boast, without the slightest foundation in truth.

"Wifey should Higgins have done your father such a deliberate wrong, Aileen?" I at length inquired.

"Because father once had a quarrel with him and a deal of bitter words. Higgins didn't dare to say anything, for father could have had him put away from the work if he had told the foreman about it; but he had kept it shut up in his mind and done that out of revenge."

I began to think that Aileen was not to be so easily disposed of after all.

"What would you like me to do, then?" I at last asked, hoping to find her hopelessly puzzled.

"To put Higgins in jail, and let out my father," she very promptly answered.

"Well, you know, that is not so easy as you think. You see, Aileen, we've no *proof* that Higgins committed the crime."

"Didn't I hear him confess it?" cried the child, with eyes widely opened.

"Yes, but you know you are an interested person."

"What's that, sur?"

"It means that you would be glad to see your father set free."

"Wouldn't I? I'd lape as high as the house!" cried Aileen with energy. "Sure, there's no sin in that, when it's me own father."

"But, really, we must have better evidence than that," I said in desperation. "Where is that to be got?"

"Oh, you'll ketch him, never jear," said Aileen, with unbounded confidence. "You're mighty good at them things. I heard a man say wunst that M'Govan could ketch any man he'd a mind to."

"Just so," I said, showing some annoyance. "People think I can do everything, but I can't."

Aileen would not believe that, and persisted so in me doing it at once that I found argument useless, and at last agreed to try if anything could be done. I questioned her closely on the habits of Higgins, the places he haunted, and certain unmistakable features by which I might recognise him, the interval between the trial and that time having almost obliterated the features from my memory. Aileen was then taken care of till the evening, when she was taken down to the railway station and provided with a third-class ticket for the station nearest her home. She was told also that I was going thither in the same carriage, and was keeping a sharp look-out for me, as I could notice, up to the moment of the train starting. I was done up as a common, slouching labourer, and sat exactly opposite Aileen during the whole journey without being once suspected or recognised by the sharp-eyed child. On reaching our destination, as soon as the train was gone I followed her out of the station and touched her on the arm. Even then she did not know me, and was hard to convince even after she had heard my voice, and seen me edge up the wig I wore to get a fuller view of my face. When she did fairly realise my identity,

she seemed to look upon me with a species of awe, as if I had actually been two men in one. I told her to get home as quick as she could, and say nothing to any one—an advice which, fortunately for me, she did not fulfil strictly to the letter.

After parting with Aileen I sauntered slowly through the dingy little place, and finally dropped into one of the two public-houses. There was a full house of miners and labourers drinking in the different rooms, playing draughts and dominoes, swearing profusely, but otherwise conducting themselves in a tolerably orderly manner. I went to a particular room and called for some drink. In this place the occupants were divided into groups, and in one of these I chanced to hear some one addressed as "Higgy," and at once spotted my man and recognised him beyond doubt. Whether the man's conscience was not at ease, or he was merely eaten up with curiosity, I cannot say, but it seemed to me that shortly after my entrance he was regarding me with more than ordinary interest. I was not at all afraid of being recognised, as I had not appeared in the trial of O'Reilly at all; and I appeared to see nothing, and certainly never dreamt of being the first to open up a conversation. By-and-by he left his companions and asked if I was a stranger, when I had come, and if I was looking for a job, all of which I answered more or less frankly. A good deal of talk followed which I have forgotten, but in less than an hour we were "thick as doughs' heids," a result which had not been brought about without a good deal of liberal expenditure on my part. Higgins was to be my friend for life; was to take me out to the works on the morrow, and himself put in a word with the manager that I might be taken on; and was then, for a consideration, of course, to personally superintend my efforts in the new line. All this was to be paid for, and, that there might be no bad debts, Higgins said he would take the "loan" of five shillings then, which, after much haggling, I agreed to and paid. At length, in a burst of confidence, I got him to lower his head while I darkly whispered—

"I don't mind telling you that it wasn't work alone that brought me here—I'm after another job entirely."

Of course Higgins wished to be let into the secret, and of course I refused, though gradually I allowed him to wheedle me into a more pliant frame of mind.

"Well, I'll tell ye; but mind it's only between ourselves," I said, in an eager whisper, and with a cautious look round the room, as if in fear of being overheard. "I'm told there's a

man I knew staying here; his name's Tim O'Reilly; and between us two I'd just *like to give that man what he deserves*," and a diabolical poke into Higgins' ribs and a coarse chuckle carried him off his feet.

"Tim O'Reilly?" said Higgins, with a slight start, which I appeared not to notice. "Why, he's not here now."

"Oh yes, he is; his house is along the road a bit," I persisted with much energy; "and I'd give a sovereign this minute to be even with him. I owe him something which I'll pay, though it should be years yet."

I appeared to be under the influence of great and suppressed excitement, which was actually in one sense the case; and Higgins, fairly carried away, extended his dirty paw across the table, and shook mine long and warmly.

"I know what ye mane," he said at last, in a whisper even more cautious than my own, "and mebbes I might be able to help ye in that too. I know Tim O'Reilly well, for I had an old grudge agin him mysel. And, begor, I paid it off too."

I was now fairly trembling with eager excitement, and was very near, in the indiscreet impulse of the moment, crying out, "How? how?" But caution won the victory, and I sulkily answered—

"Well, well; but that's got nothing to do with my case. Your grudge and mine are two different things, and paying off yours won't settle mine."

"No, that's true; but you can't get at O'Reilly just now, for he's in jail," said Higgins gloatingly.

"There's no jail built that can keep me from him," I said with perfect truth, and much appearance of heat.

"Whisht, man; and I'll tell ye how he was put there," said Higgins, now perfectly off his guard.

"I don't want to hear it—it's the man I want," I roughly answered; but after I had ordered more drink, Higgins persisted in returning to the subject.

"It was me that did it, man—me!" he said, with all the exultation of a hero, while I had difficulty in restraining myself from knocking him down.

"I don't believe it—it's not possible," I rudely replied, and then he gave me the facts.

"I was taking some oil out of the work to send to a friend that pays me well for it," he began, "when the watchman colared me, and gave me a bating. I got off, and was going along the road, when I sees O'Reilly sitting half drunk under a hedge.

I was that mad at the sore bones I'd got that I set on him wid the stick I carried, and gave him a bat in the eye and a bating over the head afore he knew where he was. Then I was afear'd that they'd chase me or search my house for the oil, and I got a woman I could trust to slip into O'Reilly's house with it under her shawl when there was nobody in but the little boy."

"But how could that put him in jail?" I said, looking stupid. "They couldn't prove from that that he had stolen it."

"No; but the queer thing was that they looked for a man who had got a bating, and fix'd on O'Reilly, though I'd never thought on it when I was pitching into him. Then some one heard that I'd seen him near the works—which was almost true—and I was called as a witness against him."

"And you swore away his liberty?" I said, fast losing command of myself.

"I didn't need, scarcely, for a hankerchief of mine was found in his pocket, which the watchman swore to."

"And which you put there, no doubt?"

"No, I didn't; I lost it—I think I had dropped it when I was giving him a bat on the eye, and it's like as not he had picked it up and put it in his pocket."

"Then you're a thundering villain!" I shouted, springing to my feet and throttling him, to the amazement of the other noisy groups in the room. Higgings was too astonished at first to resist or utter a word, and was borne backwards in my grasp; but then a howl of rage rose from his friends, and they precipitated themselves upon me with a commotion that brought the whole houseful crowding in at the door. As the frantic crowd advanced, I managed to get one arm and hand free, and instantly whipped out my little silver-headed staff of authority, and cried imperatively—

"In the Queen's name, help!"

A startled pause followed, and the men were hanging back in dismay, when one bully shouted—"Down with him; he's a peeler in disguise! pitch into him!"

They would have been on me in a moment, but at the same instant little shadowy Aileen O'Reilly sprang to the front, crying—

"It's to clear my father's name! It's M'Govan, the detective, from Edinburgh, and that man he's holding is the real thafe of the oil!"

Whether it was the ringing voice of the child falling so suddenly on their ears, or the terror of the law, or the utterance of my own name that did it, I could never tell, but in an instant all the sympathy merged the other way. Two or three of them grasped and held Higgins till I got my bracelets on his wrists, and the rest sedulously assisting me and congratulating me upon my capture. My wig had fallen off during the struggle, and in my anxiety to recover it, I had failed to notice particularly the sudden change in Higgins' manner. His struggles had ceased like magic, and when he was handcuffed I found that he had so far lost his senses that the men had absolutely to hold him up in their arms.

"He has turned awfully drunk all of a sudden," said one of the men to me, and drunk Higgins continued to be till I got him to the nearest police station, and had him locked him up for the night.

Next morning, when I went to conduct him to Edinburgh, I understood the wily move more clearly when I found he professed to have forgotten all that had taken place the night before, and particularly what he had spoken to me in the shape of a confession.

It was clear to me that I had a wily fox to deal with, and one who would double, and turn, and wriggle to the very last. However, by questioning Aileen's little brother, I found beyond question that a woman had entered the house on the night of the robbery, and had gone for a moment into the back room. Mrs O'Reilly also recalled the fact that little Morty had at the time spoken of a woman coming in, but had been too concerned at the moment to pay much attention to the statement. Little Morty, of course, was too young to be sworn, but he could nevertheless be heard in evidence; and, with Aileen and myself, we had such a good case that I was indifferent whether Higgins pleaded guilty or not. He seemed to realise the fact for himself, however, and caved in and pled guilty with a view to shortening his sentence, which was two years' imprisonment.

As for O'Reilly, he was borne back in great triumph in a carriage, with the good Father Donovan sitting by his side with a face beaming with brightness and joy, and the whole village hurrahing in his wake. His name was cleared—that was all he cared for—and the past disgrace and imprisonment were all forgotten and effaced by that joyous thought. Aileen was half-mad with joy; and after "leaping as high as the house, and

near crying her eyes out with joy," she sent me as a present—what do you think?—a bunch of gowans and buttercups, with a paper wrapped round the stems, on which was written in large text, "WITH AILEEN'S LOVE AND BLESSINGS," and four large crosses for kisses, and one scrawling one which I suspect came from the fingers of little Morty. No present ever pleased me more.

NEEDLE NIP'S STRANGE RECORD.

THERE is such a strong tendency among men to covet, that I think it is almost a shame to exhibit very valuable jewels temptingly in a window. I am speaking now of civilised men, of course, who never steal, or intend to steal. We see a thing which we admire—perhaps a picture, or a house, or a carriage, or possibly only a bonnet or a dress—and straightway the Old Man crops up within us, and we dimly understand how covetousness had a whole commandment framed for itself. When *we* feel thus, how much more is the untutored savage of a criminal a prey to the instinctive longing. With him to see is to covet, and to covet is to plan how to possess; and if he fails, it is only because the owner has more cunning in guarding the treasure than he has in grasping it.

There was shown in one of our jewellers' windows a necklace of diamonds which must have made hundreds of ladies and others break the Tenth Commandment with every breath they drew as they gazed upon its lustre. There was no price fixed to the trinket. It was simply marked "Second-hand—for Sale," and I suspect was not the actual property of the jeweller, but simply handed to him to sell on commission. The value, if I remember rightly, was not far short of a thousand pounds, many of the stones being as big as beans, and of great purity.

It is probable that I should not have noticed the necklace particularly had it not been that one day I chanced to be passing along on the opposite side of the street, and saw standing before the window one of my "bairns" in the person of Needle Nip—a wiry, little, snub-nosed fellow, who had so much humour in him that I had often wished him anything but the troublesome pickpocket and scoundrel he was. Needle Nip was sharp and nimble in all his movements and tricks—hence his name; but he could neither read nor write—a circumstance which I had occasion to deeply regret before I had done with him.

As he stood like one entranced before the window I made a

detour, and crossed the street to see what he was admiring, and spotted the necklace the moment I got to his side.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" I remarked, touching his thin arm; "makes your mouth water, eh?"

Nip looked up with a start, and recognised me with a familiar grin.

"Oh, it'll do—it'll do," he cautiously returned. "They *looks* real any how—but you can never tell now-a-days, there's so many precious imitators and swindlers about. They are real, aren't they—them diamonds?"

This was to draw me out for his own advantage, but I at once took refuge behind my ignorance of jewells generally, and gravely asked him if he was thinking of buying the trinket as a present to his wife. Nip gave me a look—sly and leering, yet reproachful—and then a punch in the ribs, and then went away chuckling heartily at what he evidently took to be a great joke. I waited till he was out of sight, and then went in and told the jeweller to look well to his shutter and door fastenings, and see that his shop was well watched day and night, and also to be particularly careful that the diamond necklace then in the window was locked up in his safe every night. True, house-breaking was not Nip's special line, but I had the idea that his interest in the jewel was not so marked without a cause.

Whether my chance meeting with Nip at the window scared him, or caused him to alter any plan he might have formed, cannot be known; but for weeks the necklace was shown in the window, and no attempt was made to break into the place. And when the grasping paw was put out to clutch the trinket, it was done in a way far removed from my thoughts or anticipations. About a month after my chance meeting with Nip, a flashily dressed gentleman, with a cigar gracefully poised in his fingers, stopped at the cab stand nearest the jeweller's and languidly asked if the man could drive him to Mandal's, the jeweller's. Thinking he had got hold of a stranger and novice, the man obeyed with great alacrity, but was rather taken aback when the gentleman, after being landed at the jeweller's door with a grand flourish, that brought Mr Mandal himself out to receive him, slipped a coin into his hand with all the grace of a queen knighting a favourite, which proved to be his legal fare—sixpence. Disappointments are often more impressive than successes. The cabman fumed and cursed so much as he drove away that he had no difficulty in recalling the circum-

stance when I questioned him afterwards, and he identified his fare at a glance.

Meantime "Handsome Harry," as he was called, otherwise Henry Paget, swell mobster, betting agent, and pretty scoundrel generally, had been obsequiously shown into the shop and accommodated with a seat by the jeweller.

He was a stranger, a tourist visiting the city for the first time, and wished to take home with him a present for "Mrs Fitzherbert, his wife." He had no idea what would be best, and was not particular as to the price, so that the present was something uncommon—something which could not be bought every day.

Here was a customer after the jeweller's own heart, though at the mention of the words "stranger" and "hotel" he had a momentary dread of the usual thread-bare device of a sham order to be sent home and paid at the hotel, and then asked to be shown to the lady for a moment, and all ending in the usual howl of grief at the loss. But no such proposal was once hinted at; the gentleman would pay on the spot for whatever he bought, and plainly intimated that he would expect five per cent. of a reduction on that account.

The energetic tradesman believes in doing things boldly. Here was a chance to do business with the diamond necklace; and though Handsome Harry had never once hinted at the trinket, it was brought from the window and displayed by the jeweller in every light and on every colour of velvet, with an elegance which produced a visible effect on the intending purchaser. Handsome Harry said it was a beautiful article, and would make a lovely present, and all but said that he would take it till the price was named, when he dropped it into the jeweller's hands as abruptly as if it had burned his white and taper fingers.

"What! are you serious? Oh, hang it, you know, I'm not a millionaire—I could never think of giving so much for a mere bauble—no, no; I could not afford it; and if I could, I would think twice before I should waste so much. It would be as good as paying away forty pounds a-year. That's too much."

Yet, though he thus protested against the price, and proved to his own satisfaction that no one should throw away such a sum upon a mere trinket, he continued to fondle it, and turn it up to the light occasionally as the jeweller brought forth less expensive articles for his inspection. At length he fixed upon a brooch, bracelet, and ear-rings in dull gold instead of the necklace, and then discovered, on examining his purse, that he

had not enough money with him to pay for them. That, however, need not inconvenience either of them, for he had only to go to his hotel—which he named—for a fresh supply; and if the jeweller would kindly put up the things for him, he would drop in in an hour or so to settle the account and receive the jewels. It is quite possible that he would have left the shop to go to the hotel, or elsewhere—an arrangement to which the jeweller had readily consented—had not Mr Mandal made a discovery almost simultaneous with that of his glib-tongued customer—namely, the loss of the diamond necklace. He had placed the jewel but a moment before in the hands of Handsome Harry, and he had certainly not received it back, but from Harry's hands it had vanished as by magic.

Pale with apprehension, the jeweller glanced over the articles he had been displaying; saw that the necklace was gone, and said hurriedly—

“I beg your pardon, but I don't see the necklace.”

“Possibly; you can look for it while I am gone,” said the cool visitor, calmly lighting a fresh cigar and making for the door. “Don't forget to deduct the five per cent. from the account.”

“Stop! stop! This won't do, you know; the necklace is gone, and you had it last,” cried the jeweller, now getting desperate, and at the same moment touching a bell which brought an assistant from the back-shop; “I cannot allow you to leave the shop till I find it.”

Handsome Harry, who had half excited the distrust of the jeweller more than once during the interview, drew himself up with much indignation and apparent wrath, and loudly demanded to know if Mr Mandal thought he was a thief? He would even have left the shop by force, had not the jeweller and his assistant thrown themselves bodily upon him and detained him by force, while an apprentice was despatched for a policeman. A policeman is said never to be had when he is wanted; but in a minute or two the boy returned with two—one of whom grinned out whenever he saw Handsome Harry, and said—

“Oh, it's him! he's been reported to us, but this is the first attempt at business.”

The moment Mr Mandal learned that his customer was suspected to be not a gentleman but a professional thief, he demanded to have him stripped and searched there and then, but to this the policemen could not listen.

"We must take him to the Office first."

"But suppose he throws away the necklace on the way, who's to make up the loss to me?" cried Mandal; but to this the men had an effectual reply.

"We'll be responsible for that—we've seen that little game before, and know how to prevent it," they smilingly replied; and there and then they brought out their handcuffs, and securely fastened each of his wrists to their own, unmoved by the fact that Harry deliberately turned out every one of his pockets to prove that the jewel was not in his possession. The sight of the policeman entering the shop, and the tantalising delay while the peculiar case was being explained, had drawn to the spot a number of curious passers-by; and when the men appeared at the door with their prisoner, and accompanied by the jeweller, who had to go with them to lodge the charge, quite a commotion ensued. Eager questions were thrown and sternly ignored, and the four men moved along the street followed by a crowd which increased rather than diminished as they advanced.

Rather ashamed of the attention he was attracting close to the prison, Mr Mandal hung back and became part of the crowd, and while thus progressing was eagerly addressed by a thin, sharp-looking ruffian who had joined the crowd on the way—no other than Needle Nip.

"What's up, mister, do you know?" said the nimble thief, with great apparent interest, indicating the police and prisoner with a dab of his dirty thumb. "What's he nabbed for?"

"I don't know!" savagely answered the jeweller, trying to look unconscious, though his face was so crimson with excitement and glossy with perspiration that the dullest or most stupid could have spotted him at a glance as the injured man.

"Well, well, ye needn't take a body's nose off," said Nip, with an injured look. "He don't look much put about, anyhow, whatever he has done;" and this struck the jeweller as so sound and truthful that he thought no more of the vulgar inquirer, who was soon jostled from his side by stronger or more eager questioners. The coolness of Handsome Harry, indeed, had been the most remarkable feature in the case. He neither appeared flustered nor guilty when the police handcuffed him. He merely smiled drily, and said that his lawyer would settle with them for the indignity, and that he would rather enjoy the walk to the Police Station, seeing that he would be paid so handsomely for the trouble as soon as he

brought the case to a court of law. All this struck the policemen as were bravado, and they were not for a moment thrown off their guard. From the time that the jeweller's shop was left till they stood safe within the "reception room" in the Central Office, they kept such a sharp eye on Handsome Harry that they were prepared to swear that it was absolutely impossible that he could have dropped the stolen necklace, or in any way conveyed it to another. In this watchfulness they were assisted by the jeweller himself, who declared that not only had the necklace not been dropped, but no one of the crowd had once been within ten yards of the prisoner, whose wrists, moreover, were firmly secured to those of the policeman.

Inside the Office, I recognised Handsome Harry at a glance. I believed him to be an old convict, though I could not point to any previous conviction, and I had seen him so often dodging about the different race-courses that he had the effrontery, the moment he sighted me, to favour me with a familiar nod, and say—

"How do you do, Mr M'Govan? These stupid idiots have actually mistaken me for a thief, and brought me here in spite of all my protests."

"Ah, these things will happen," I dryly returned; and then, after taking down the particulars of the case, I ordered him to be stripped to the skin and searched—myself taking part in the work.

It was, as I found, literally impossible that the man could have swallowed the necklace, and as impossible that he could have dropped it or passed it to another; therefore I fully expected to find it in his clothes, his boots, or his hat, or hair. But I was disappointed. I found the necklace nowhere—it was gone, as wondrously and mysteriously as if the touch of his fingers had suddenly changed the diamonds and metal into invisible gases. The jeweller, who assisted diligently in the search, could hardly believe his own eyes, and dropped into a chair almost fainting when the painful truth was forced upon him.

The necklace was gone, but how or whither not one of us could hazard even a guess. At the first stagger of disappointment I thought it possible that Handsome Harry, during the sending for the police, had tossed the jewel into some corner in the shop when he feared matters were getting hot for him, and I went down to the shop to see; but again I was wrong, and, indeed, as will appear presently, I was as far from the real solution as it was possible to be.

Finding himself triumphant, as his unaffected gaiety and merciless chaffing might have told us he would be, Handsome Harry loftily demanded to be released at once, but that we could hardly allow. Then he pretended to be indignant, and spoke of writing to his lawyer, but was in no haste to ask for paper and pens. As he had spoken to the jeweller of a particular hotel, I thought I would have a catch at him there, and went to the place only to find that he actually had spent a night in the establishment, leaving behind him, however, nothing but the bill against him. This was an awkward confirmation for us, as it left us but little excuse for detaining him. All we could do now was to make sure that Handsome Harry had not *swallowed* the necklace, and finding that he had not, we were all but at the end of our tether. I questioned the jeweller closely as to whether he had not inadvertently or unconsciously slipped the jewel into his own pocket, but was met by a decidedly negative.

"I saw the necklace in his hand one moment, and the next it was gone," he said. "It was the quickness with which it vanished right under my eyes that made me miss it. I looked down among the things before me, thinking he might have laid it down, and then I spoke out and collared him him."

Thus disappointed on every hand, I was thrown back on my own resources, and gave the case a great deal of thought and study, and the longer I pondered the more decidedly I came to the conclusion that the whole robbery had been an ingeniously arranged "plant," in which more than one of my "bairns" had taken part. That there had been some clever dropping or palming between the shop and the Police Chambers I was certain; my only difficulty was to discover who had been Harry's confederate. Perhaps I ought to have thought of Needle Nip. It seems strange now that I did not; but the fact is I had never known the two to be seen together. Harry was a new arrival, while Nip was an established pest, having a wife and a house, and filling up his time by shebeening when thieving was scarce or risky.

I did not think of Nip, and simply began a series of ferreting to find out whom he had been seen consorting with immediately before the robbery. *Then* I thought of Nip, for it was clear that they had been very much together in a secret way. Then on mentioning the fact to M'Sweeny, who had been in the High Street when the crowd passed up, he distinctly remembered noticing Nip among them. On discovering this

important clue, I began to dimly grope at the real secret of the mysterious robbery.

"Was any one with him?" I asked of my chum. "Or was he near Handsome Harry—near enough for any palming or dodging?"

"Not a bit—he was talking to Mr Mandal—axing him something, I think; but I didn't take particular notice. I just noticed his ugly head for a minit, and then it was swallowed up by the crowd."

Down I went at once to Mr Mandal, described Nip, and asked him what the man had said to him. The result was a repetition of what I have already recorded; but that was scarcely enough for me.

"Are you sure he did not jostle ——?"

"He was never near the prisoner—neither he nor any one," interrupted the jeweller.

"I don't mean that—are you sure he did not jostle *you*?" I said, with a touch of impatience.

"Me?—why?—how?—what good would that have done?" cried Mr Mandal in surprise.

"None to you, certainly. Had you that coat on?"

"Yes."

"Pockets outside—no flaps to them—easily picked, and as easy to slip anything into them," I meditatively added, more to myself than him, as I examined the coat. "I believe I've got the clue at last."

"And what is it, pray?"

"Well, I am not sure as yet, but I suspect that Handsome Harry slipped the necklace into *your* pocket, in which it remained till you were on the way to the Office with him, when it was removed by Needle Nip."

"Well, I never! Who would have thought of such a scheme?"

"Nobody but Needle Nip. If that little wretch had only been educated, he has the brain for much better things. Handsome Harry again can only look pretty, and swindle in a bare-faced way—he has no brain."

"Then you will get the necklace back again? For goodness' sake try your best to recover it."

"I must try to get Nip in the first place. I may get the necklace too, but I wouldn't stake much on that."

I fully expected that Nip would be already "far from the land where his forefathers slept," with the necklace in his

travelling-bag—probably across at Rotterdam, or some port abounding in gem dealers, with easy consciences, and ready means at their command for altering and utilising the precious stones. But I was agreeably disappointed to find him at home.

"I want you to come up with me as far as the Office," I said, after declining a seat and some methylated spirits or aqua fortis, which he called whisky.

"What's up? Nothing wrong, eh?" he said, scenting danger at once.

"It's about that necklace business," I replied, getting one link of the handcuffs ready.

"Well, I'm blowed! I thought you would suspect me the minute I heard of it. But you're wrong. I'm not in that plant."

"I didn't expect you to say you were," I smilingly returned. "It was well planned, too; but M'Sweeny happened to see you while you were speaking to the jeweller, and"—; and to finish the sentence I imitated the picking of an outside pocket with my forefingers.

Nip seemed thunderstruck for a moment, and stared at me so curiously that I at once guessed that he though Handsome Harry had made a clean breast of it.

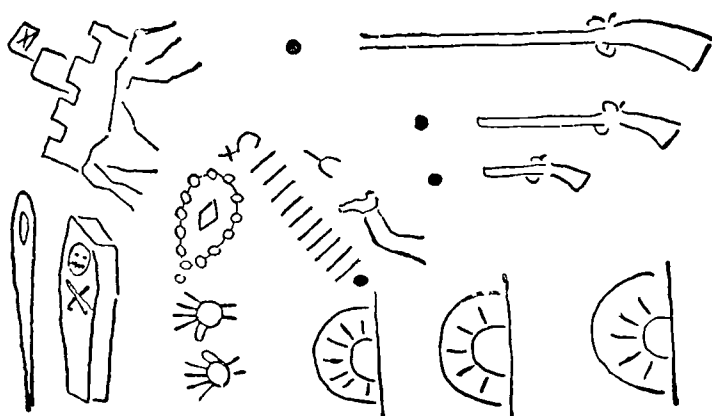
"M'Sweeny couldn't say he saw me pick anybody's pocket," he doggedly returned. "If he does, he's swearing a lie."

"M'Sweeny didn't say so—I said it," I sharply answered, and then he prudently relapsed into silence.

But though I had the house searched from end to end, and took him and his wife away for a week or two's free lodgings and board, I made nothing of him. I found no trace of the necklace; I got no evidence that he had picked Mr Mandal's pocket, or been connected with the robbery in any way, and we were forced at last with much reluctance to let him and his wife go. It is possible, but not very probable, that we might have got trace of the plunder after all, even if the most inexorable detective in the world had not stepped in to pull up Needle Nip. As it was, the whole was as nearly being lost to everybody for all time as it is possible for anything to be.

Not many days after his release Nip was taken ill, and his illness speedily proved to be the worst form of scarlet fever. He could not be moved, and all the police could do was to isolate him by clearing the rooms close by. No doubt the reader expects that Needle Nip, seeing his end approaching,

repented in the piteous manner so common in tracts, and confessed all about the robbery, and where the necklace was to be found. Nothing of the kind. He certainly in his sensible moments asked to see his wife, but as he was delirious before she appeared, she, guessing the object, entreated to be sent for the moment he was able to speak to her. She would have been sent for, but Nip died the same night, giving no sign; and from sundry exclamations of his wife, I suspected that the secret had died with him. Had he been able to write, I have no doubt the case would have been different. As it was he was buried, and as a matter of precaution his clothes, as well as the bed whereon he had lain, were ordered to be destroyed. They appeared to be burned; but it chanced that Nip's wife had set her heart on retaining a waistcoat of flowered silk, of which her husband had always been particularly vain. This she managed to smuggle from the pile, and gave it as a present to her father, an old pest of a reset. Was the gift a lucky or an unlucky one for the world? The old villain took ill next day and was hurried to the Infirmary, where he died, his last sensible words being, "If it hadn't been for that——waistcoat of Needle Nip's I might have been as right as the mail this minute." The waistcoat now met its proper fate and was destroyed, but the person employed to do so found in one of the pockets a pencil stump, and a bit of crumpled paper bearing the rough and enigmatical sketch below:—



As the above curious paper was placed in my hands with something like its history, I soon came to the conclusion, that as it had been drawn out during Needle Nip's last illness, it was a kind of holograph last will and testament, and doubly curious as having been executed by a man who could not write a single letter of the alphabet. Nip, like all professional criminals, had little or nothing to bequeath, but he carried in his head an important secret—the sole knowledge of the hiding place of a valuable diamond necklace. He could easily have revealed the knowledge to us, but that would have been betraying his companion and possibly implicating his wife. Indeed, I may say, he was directly asked to do so, but refused in language which need not be particularised. What he had wanted in his last sensible moments was to convey the secret, by dark signs and symbols, to his friends, which should be quite unintelligible to us, should the paper fall into our hands. In this he erred, if possible, on the side of caution; for when I appealed to those very individuals for a translation, they truthfully declared that they did not know what the thing meant. To a certain extent, I thought, I could read the symbols myself, but beyond that point, even with the aid of the prisoner Handsome Harry, I could not go. Harry had been dreadfully depressed when told of the death of Nip—not at losing a companion in crime, but at the secret of the hiding-place perishing with him, and in the momentary confusion had half admitted that my solution as to the mode of the robbery was the true one. But he could not help me to a proper reading of the record. He was a comparative stranger in Edinburgh, and knew little of its favourite hiding-places; and Nip's wife, when appealed to, bitterly complained that Nip had never made a confidant of her—that he “told her nothing,” probably being warned by experience that that was the only safe course.

I turned then to the will, or map, or record itself, and spent so much time over it—sometimes rising in the middle of the night to re-examine it—that my wife more than once threatened to burn it, but didn't. At first I thought that the long thing at the top was meant for an eel, but noting the general roughness of the drawing, I at length concluded that it was meant for a needle, and therefore to represent Needle Nip himself. The coffin and cross-bones immediately below told their own tale, and the literal reading was, “Needle Nip is dead”—or, “if Needle Nip dies, this is his last direction or will and testament.” The castle close to the coffin seemed to me to

give a locality, but this was the most misleading item in the record, and caused me more than once to heap not exactly blessings on Nip's memory. Further down was a thing quite intelligible—a rude representation of the stolen necklace, with a diamond mark, signifying "Bone—good—something to be had here" within. Next to it was the old beggar's, or Romany mark, signifying "Stop here," with ten marks ending in a dot and a leg; and another beggar's symbol meaning, "Go in this direction." The spread fingers of the two hands were merely a repetition or emphasising of the number ten already given by the ten strokes or lines; and the leg appended plainly indicated that you were to go ten paces in that direction, and then stop and find something good—the paces to begin at the dot close to the arch or bridge, which would probably be a stone or a stump. Thus far the translations seemed tolerably easy to me, but the three arches or bridges, and the three guns of different sizes, each with a bullet in front of its muzzle, were as inscrutable as Sphinxes. At first, ignoring the general correctness of the details, I set them down as railway arches or bridges, overlooking the fact that they were round on the top, and not flat, and jumping to a swift conclusion, from the castle being above, decided that they represented those in West Princes Street Gardens. I had many a hunt in that direction, all in vain; I even had the earth turned up ten paces from each of the arches and bridges, but without success; and then it struck me that I was viewing the castle from the wrong side, as Nip's beautifully executed drawing seemed to have been meant for the side facing south instead of north, as I had at first imagined. The only arch at that side that I could think of was that spanning the low road leading round the back of the Castle from the Grassmarket; and I soon proved that it was not that which was meant.

Up to this point in the investigation I had been powerless to explain the meaning of the guns represented in the picture; and though I showed them to some dozens of not very stupid experts, they were unable to help me. The first break of dawn on the point came to me suddenly one day while seated at dinner, with the record before me, when I started and said to my wife—

"Why, I've seen three arches like these somewhere about Edinburgh—low arches just like these—where was it? Don't you remember?"

She could not, and the matter had to rest thus for some

days, till I happened to be glancing over the newspaper one morning, and my eyes caught the words, "Volunteer shot in Hunter's Bog." Then I remembered where the arches—or at least arches like those in the drawing—stood. In the draining of the valley known as Hunter's Bog the water was utilised by the erection of rude wells, faced by arches much like those in Nip's drawing. The wells were often dry, but when filled were often used by those who bleached their clothes on the adjoining sunny slopes. A look at the drawing now convinced me that the guns of different length represented the short and long shooting-ranges occupying the centre of the valley. Without any delay I had the valley explored by night, and going to the arch or well furthest up the valley found a big stone close to its northern side. I measured off ten paces from the spot, walking as near as I could guess in *the direction of the castle*, and after half-an-hour's search, simply induced by my legs being longer than those of Nip, we found a tin box, and in the box the diamond necklace.

Handsome Harry got seven years for his share in the work. I was always a little vain of my share in the case, but I got less praise for it than for many which have cost me infinitely less labour.

A SPIDER'S WEB.

PEGGY ROSS, a rather plain-looking milk girl, aged only eleven, was trudging her afternoon round at the Grange, with bright flowers and fresh green foliage bursting forth on every side under the magic breath of the young summer, and her own heart inclined to follow their example. Peggy, like the trees and flowers, had had a hard winter of it, and might well rejoice and be ecstatic over troubles vanquished, toil successfully accomplished. In her right hand Peggy carried a large milk can, with a whole family of little cans strung round it with hooks, and in an emblematic way the large milk can represented little Peggy. She had a whole family of little milk cans, so to speak, fastened to her by hooks, and all requiring to be filled. Peggy, in fact, though so young, was a little mother, the largest of her family being her grandfather, the next her brother Bob, aged twelve, and the next her sister Jessie, aged nine. "Why, that's only three altogether, or four, if you count Peggy," some one exclaims; "no very large family that." True, when you have a large income with which to keep it. Peggy hadn't that, so the family was large.

"And boys eat such a deal," Peggy would reflectively observe, when discussing the point. "Bob gets half-a-crown a-week for running messages, but the running and the fresh air, I think, only give him an appetite. He'd eat a whole half-crown's worth in half-a-week if I didn't watch and manage. Jessie and me don't eat much, because we're only girls, and grandfather as good as lives on air; but boys must be fed, I've heard, or they're apt to die. Oh, I couldn't live without Bob, so I'd rather starve myself to a skeleton, and pinch and save, than have him hungry. And the best of it is, he never bothers his head where it comes from. If he knew the thinking I have to get it, I don't believe he'd half enjoy it."

"But I've got through the winter after all," said Peggy, bravely, to herself, as she trudged through the rows of handsome villas, and through their sweet-smelling garden-plots,

which seemed to have been laid out expressly for her to enjoy and admire. "I've always gone out with my milk in the mornings, gone to school in the day, and done my milk round and errands at night, and kept them all right and straight. I'm not in debt either, though I've a hard job to manage it, and all I need now is a pair of boots for Bob. I wonder why they charge so much for boys' boots. If it was only for me, now, anything would do, but a boy mustn't get his feet wet, and they need to be strong and good. But then money is so scarce."

Peggy was advancing to one of the many houses she served, and, it might be added, one of the many houses in which she was a great favourite, when her attention was diverted from herself and her concerns by the approach of a genteel-looking woman, dressed in widow's mournings, who hailed her with the words—

"Aren't you Peggy, the milk girl?"

"Yes, ma'am," and Peggy put down her can to curtsy, the woman before her having an engaging and attractive manner, which had deceived more experienced heads than Peggy's. It struck Peggy that she had more than once of late noticed the strange woman in going her rounds; and though pretty sure that she was not a lady, thought it just possible that she might be looking for some one whom none but Peggy was likely to know. The woman was a clever and accomplished thief, named Bell Murray; but Peggy had no knowledge of thieves, and as Bell could put on an artless appearance as a genteel beggar, which had deceived even ministers and magistrates when she favoured them with a call, it was not likely that she would be less successful with a simple milk girl.

"You serve Mrs Naismith with milk, I believe?" sweetly continued the strange woman. "That is, at Hill View Villa?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; and Mrs Naismith is very kind to me, and the servants too. I got this dress from her;" and Peggy reddened a little as she indicated the frock, which she had made down for herself in a style which would have sent a skilled dress-maker into hysterics.

"Yes, Mrs Naismith is a dear, kind lady," said Bell Murray, with affected rapture; "but do you know the servant?"

"Which one?"

Peggy asked the question simply, and it appeared for a moment to stagger her questioner, who, however, vaguely answered—

"Oh, the one that takes in the milk from you."

"That's Maggie Gray," said Peggy, with brightening aspect. "Oh, I'm awfully fond of her, for she often gives me a piece with meat between it, enough to do all our dinners."

Peggy's enthusiasm appeared to be catching, for the woman in widow's mournings hastily took out a white pocket handkerchief and wiped diligently at her eyes, as if quite overcome with emotion.

"Yes, yes, she's a good girl—a good girl," she said, in broken tones; "and letting you into a secret—but you will not tell any one? not even Maggie herself? If I give you half-a-crown to yourself, will you keep the secret?"

Half-a-crown! the word almost took Peggy's breath away, and her senses along with it; but she hastened to observe—

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I can keep your secret for nothing."

"No, no; that would never do," firmly insisted Bell Murray, producing a half-crown and generously pressing it into Peggy's hand. "I must pay you, and, besides, I wish you to help me to see and speak to my daughter without any one else in the house knowing anything about it."

"Your daughter, ma'am?—is Maggie your daughter?" cried Peggy in surprise, scanning Bell Murray's face in vain for traces of a resemblance.

"Yes, dear, I am Mrs Gray, and Maggie is my daughter," coolly returned the impostor; "but I have been unfortunate, and Mrs Naismith has forbidden me to come near the house to speak to Maggie. Just now Mrs Naismith and the family are away from home, but if any of the other servants saw me they would tell, and Maggie would be discharged."

"Then, would you like me to tell Maggie you're here, and come out and speak to you?" quickly inquired Peggy.

"Yes, that would do, I daresay," dubiously answered the thief. "Or I can tell you what would be better. You know the scullery at the end of the house, close to the kitchen?"

"Oh, yes; I know it well; I've often been in it," eagerly answered Peggy.

"And Maggie often goes into it when none of the others are near," observed Bell Murray, with wonderful acuteness. "There's a window to it close to the garden walk, at the back, so that if that window wasn't barred on the inside I could go round and throw up the window whenever I saw Maggie come into the scullery."

"But the window is barred, and the bar is never out of it,"

said Peggy. "I've seen it often, and I think it's because it's the only window that hasn't a shutter inside to close at night to keep thieves out."

"But p'raps you could slip the bolt back without any one seeing you?" artlessly suggested Bell Murray. "It would be such a joyful surprise to Maggie to see me there where she least expected me."

"Yes, I could do that," hesitatingly answered Peggy; "that is, if you're quite sure Maggie would not be angry with me after."

"Angry with you! She would bless you for it," was the enthusiastic rejoinder of the cunning thieves' tout. "She would lay down her life to see her mother, only she daren't offend her mistress."

"And may I not give Maggie the least hint of who's coming to speak to her at the window?" asked Peggy, who did not feel quite easy in having a hand in such mysterious doings, though a joyful thrill told her that the half-crown nestling in her palm would buy her brother a strong pair of second-hand boots the moment she could find time to buy them for him.

"No, no; the surprise will be the best," hurriedly returned Bell Murray. "And now, in case I should never see you again, good-bye."

The ladylike figure in mournings was gone, and Peggy turned to resume her pitchers and her trudging up to the house alluded to as Hill View Villa. She being a privileged and regular visitant, did not pause to ring the kitchen bell, and wait till gate and door were opened to her, but pressing open the gate, walked straight in with merely a light tap at the door, before entering. When she stood within the kitchen she found it deserted, though the customary dish stood ready on the clean dresser for the milk. Peggy measured out the milk, and peeping into the scullery, found it also empty. Then the thought of the curious task allotted to her came swiftly to mind, and, with something like a guilty flush mounting her cheeks, she stole towards the window, and with some difficulty drew back the rusty fastening, destroying as she did so a spider's web which had held undisturbed possession of the spot for years. A sound of some one tripping lightly down stairs from above, and singing blithely as they came, drew her hurriedly out of the place to the milk can and measures at the kitchen dresser, and brought the first twinge of conscience regarding the secret mission.

"Surely," she said to herself, as Maggie Gray bustled into the kitchen and greeted her with a kind smile, "surely I am not doing something wrong—something which Mrs Naismith would quarrel me for if she found it out?"

"Oh, Peggy, is that you?" said the servant unsuspectingly. "I heard you come in, but thought you were gone long ago."

Peggy reddened furiously, though why she knew not, and the servant noted the circumstance, to recall it afterwards with interest. It was unusual for Peggy to blush so guiltily, and that fact, I suppose, caused the confusion to be remembered. As it was, Maggie thought she divined the cause of Peggy's loitering, and, calling her back, thrust a paper of broken meats into her hand, saying, with womanly tact, that Peggy could "eat it on the road;" and then the two parted for the day. When near the end of her round, she was again accosted by Bell Murray, who appeared intensely grateful for Peggy's goodness in unfastening the window; and after enjoining her to keep the fact to herself, disappeared in the direction of Hill View Villa, with the avowed intention of seeing "her daughter Maggie."

As a matter of fact, no one called upon Maggie Gray that day; but in the middle of the night she was awakened by the sound of some one—a man, she thought—walking through the room next to that in which she slept. Maggie was not lacking in courage, and though all the other servants slept in the attics, she at once slipped out of bed and crept to the door of the room to listen. Through the keyhole she caught sight of a flash of light, and among a string of whispered imprecations heard the words, "Bell was right—here's something worth lifting at last."

"There's robbers in the house," was Maggie's horrified exclamation as she staggered back, half fainting with fear. "How could they have got in, when I closed and barred every shutter and door myself?"

Maggie could have screamed, and so alarmed and roused the other servants; but her first thought was to get out of the house unseen, give the alarm to a policeman, and have the thieves trapped. With this intention she slipped on her things, and waited breathlessly till the men moved to the front of the house, as she thought, when she opened the door, and glided out into the lobby, where she was instantly felled like an ox. She had fallen with one cruel blow, which had been delivered full on the temple with some blunt instrument, pro-

bably a "neddy;" and, I was inclined to think, had been heard moving, and deliberately waited for by the housebreakers.

The thieves had made a clean sweep of everything valuable in the house, including some silver plate, a gold watch worth forty guineas, and notably a silver-plated dessert spoon, which had been given as a present to one of the children, and bore the initial of his Christian name, the letter P., on the handle. Poor Maggie was found in an insensible state on the floor by the other servants; and then word was sent to the Central Office, as well as by telegraph to the master of the house. The message brought to the Office was to the effect that entrance had been gained by picking the lock, and unfastening in some way the bolts of the front door, because that was the only door in the house found open; but upon my arrival I clearly proved the thing impossible. The heavy bars on the door had each a patent fastening which could be loosened from the inside only. A close search and keen examination of the other doors and windows revealed the astounding fact that not a hinge or hasp had been forced or a window pane broken, and I was beginning to doubt the correctness of my own decision regarding the front door till I was shown the scullery window. Here, it is true, the window was fastened by a strong bolt, which they assured me was never drawn, and had not been touched for years; but a second glance showed me that it had been all but covered by a spider's web, which had undoubtedly been recently torn and mangled by the drawing of the bolt.

"Some one has opened this bolt lately from within," I said decidedly; and as no servant but Maggie had entered the scullery for some days, the question was finally referred to her. She was still in bed, but quite able to speak and think; and her first answer was a decided negative.

"No one ever opens that window, or could open it, but me," she said emphatically. "It has not been opened for years."

"The bolt has been drawn lately, and the window opened too," I as firmly persisted; "there are shreds of spiders' webs hanging at various places where they have been wrenched asunder in opening the window. Think again; might not some one have slipped into the house while you were in another part of the building, merely to unfasten the bolt for after use?"

"No one could come in without me knowing, as there's a spring bell on the back door," was her reply; "and, indeed, no one is ever allowed within the door, Mr Naismith is so

strict on these points—at least no one but Peggy, the milk girl.”

“Peggy, the milk girl?” I echoed with fresh interest; “and what kind of character does she bear? Might she not have done it?”

“You can ask her,” answered Maggie, with a confident smile.

“Ask her?” I repeated, with a derisive smile, “that is scarcely a good plan. People do not generally speak freely the words which are to send them to prison. But is she poor? needy?”

“Very poor, but honest, and hard-working as a grown woman. She’s only a girl, but she has as much in her head as many twice her age.”

“So I begin to fear,” was my rejoinder, spoken rather dryly; “I must have her address, and see if I can get any fresh light on the subject.”

Had the time been a little earlier in the season, when the family were at home, Peggy would have been there morning and evening, and might thus have heard of the robbery before me; but as it was, she was necessarily in complete ignorance of what had occurred. I got as complete a list of the things carried off as the table-maid could furnish me with; and then by calling at the dairy which employed Peggy, I procured her address—a rather dingy place in the Causewayside. The house was a single room on the ground floor, with only half a window above ground; and it was only after hammering rather noisily at the door that I made myself heard; and then obeying the injunction to “come in,” I opened the door and saw an old man kneeling before the empty grate with a blacklead brush in his hand, a huge towel fixed before him for an apron, and his face red with hard brushing at the little grate.

“Come in, sir; never mind me; I’m only doing my house-work,” he said, as I advanced in hesitation; “Peggy learns me how to do it while she’s out working for us. But I’m afraid I’ll never be so good at it as Peggy. Do you think now that it’s possible for a learner like me ever to be able to make that grate as good as a looking-glass?”

“That depends——” I gravely began, when he quickly caught me up with the words—

“Ah, that’s it! It depends on the learner. Now, I’m dreadful slow. There, at washing now I’m nowhere. It’s a fact, so you needn’t look surprised. When it’s a plain sheet or a pair

of stockings, I'm not so bad; but when it comes to one of Bob's shirts, or one of my white ones, I'm a fearful sloven. It's the wristbands and odd corners where the dirt gathers that bother me. And Peggy has such an eye for finding them out when I've missed them. Still she says I'll learn through time. Peggy's always hopeful;" and he made another desperate brushing onslaught on the grate before him, till a faint reflection of his crimson face and sweating brow began to show on the polished jambs.

"I suppose Peggy is a good girl, as well as a hard-working one?" I inquiringly remarked, taking the seat he had proffered.

"Good? There's nobody in this world will ever find out how good she is," answered the old man with enthusiasm, and a determined look around, as if prepared to knock any one down who disputed the point. "Peggy's the mother of this family. Without Peggy we'd all go to wreck and ruin."

I said nothing; and taking my silence as expressive of a doubt, the old man, after wiping the sweat from his brow with a hand that left a broad smear of blacklead in its place, button-holed me to argue the point.

"Look here: a great lady wouldn't come here and beg and pray of us to let Peggy go and be her servant for life, if Peggy wasn't good above ordinar, would she? Peggy isn't pretty—'spect your pretty folks ain't worth candy; good for nothing but to oil their hair, and pull on their gloves, and scent their hankies, and look languishing—but Peggy's got what many haven't, a pair of hands, quick and willin', that'll work with any woman's. I don't know your name nor anything about you, but I'll swear now you've come after Peggy?" and the old man paused with a triumphant smile to await my answer.

"Well, yes, that's true; I did come after Peggy," I reluctantly replied.

"Sure of it! I was sure of it!" he answered, with a huge chuckle and slap at his leg. "But, mind, you don't get her. She don't go with you—no, not for the Queen on the throne. No; we've resolved that we may be poor and hungry, but we'll keep together and have a home all to ourselves, with Peggy as the mother. That makes all bright and happy. You notice how dull and dingy this room is?—know what that's with? It's because Peggy's out!" and he gave me a joyous dig in the ribs with the grate brush, which nearly took my breath away.

"I am sorry that Peggy is out, as I particularly wanted to

see her," I remarked, now all but certain that I was on the wrong track.

"Ah, everybody comes after Peggy," delightedly continued the old man. "It takes me all my spare time to answer the door and speak to them. Dear knows what I shall do when she grows to be a woman and has sweethearts coming after her. I'll need to hire a man to help me to answer the door;" and he again chuckled himself nearly black in the face at his joke. "Peggy gets everybody to like her somehow. For instance, she came in yesterday with a bright half-crown in her hand which a woman had given her merely for helping her to see her daughter, a servant in the Grange."

"A half-crown!" I echoed, seeing that I was expected to look overpowered.

"Yes, a whole half-crown; and, what's more, I'll show you the present she's got from the same woman to-day. She met her in the Grange, and the woman told Peggy that she might need her help soon at another house which she serves with milk, as the woman has a niece there whom she's anxious to speak with. Now look! what do you think of that?" and the old man held up to my eyes a brightly polished dessert spoon of electro-plate.

I took the spoon in my hand with a strange start, and, examining the handle, found the letter P. there engraved.

"Ah, you see; that's for Peggy," exclaimed the old man; "she had got it done last night, on purpose for Peggy."

I took the list of articles stolen from Hill View Villa the night before from my pocket to make sure of every step, and was not surprised to find that the spoon in my hand was therein accurately described. For some moments I was too much agitated to speak, but when I did find my tongue, it was to say, as quickly as possible—

"Do you know anything of the nature of the service rendered by Peggy to this unknown woman?"

"No; that's a secret. Oh, Peggy wouldn't tell that though she were chopped in pieces. But it's nothing bad, you may depend. Peggy has a head on her shoulders that would serve for me. I said to her last night when she spoke of it, 'Peggy, secrets are bad, I 'spect;' when she said, as bright as you like, holding up the half-crown, 'No, they're not, when they let me go and buy Bob a pair of boots to-morrow. I'm sure he needs them more than any of us!'"

"And she's gone to buy them now has she?" I quietly continued.

"Yes, and she won't be long of being back, and my work isn't half done!" cried the old man with a sudden start of recollection. "Such a row I'll get; but I'll put all the blame on you;" and he held out his hand as if about to put away the spoon he had shown me, and resume his work, when a strange commotion in the street without attracted us both. We saw a number of feet crowd past the window, and shortly after heard some heavy footsteps in the passage, followed by an imperative knock at the door. I opened the door, and was startled to find myself confronted by Peggy in tears, and in the grasp of a policeman.

"They said the half-crown was a bad one!" she hysterically exclaimed, as she sprang forward into the old man's arms, "and as I could not tell them how I got it—you know that's a secret—I brought them here for you to tell them I'm honest and good, and make them go away."

"Yes, you're honest and good," tremblingly repeated the old man. "Peggy's honest and good. How dare you frighten her and make her cry?"

"Poh! that sort of nonsense won't do with us," repeated the policeman, with a touch of the hat to me. "There's too many of these bits of pewter floating about just now, as Mr M'Govan there will tell you."

"M'Govan! M'Govan!" helplessly echoed the old man, with a powerful start and a reproachful glance in my face. "Are you M'Govan, the detective?"

I simply bowed, for the tears in the old man's eyes had effectually stopped my voice.

"Then you heard what I said before I knew anything about this charge," he eagerly pursued; "what I said about Peggy? And it was all true—true as the Gospel. Peggy wouldn't do wrong to save her life."

"I am sorry to say that something more than a mere assertion will be required to acquit her of a very serious charge," I said in reply. "I have here in this spoon evidence to justify us in taking her away, even though the possession of the bad half-crown were satisfactorily explained."

"Why, what—what does the spoon prove? what has Peggy done?"

"That is what I am anxious to find out, both for Peggy's sake and my own," I gently returned. "Last night, Mr Naismith's house in the Grange was broken into, or rather entered by thieves, who could have got in only by the scullery

window, the bolt of which must have been unfastened by an accomplice within;" and as I spoke and fixed the pallid little girl with my eye, I saw her slowly and guiltily flush to a deep red. At the same time, an alarmed expression settled on her face, and she exclaimed in a terrified burst—

"Oh, surely it wasn't Maggie Gray's mother?"

"I think not. A mother would hardly sell her daughter, and leave her all but dead on the floor," I gravely answered.

"And is Maggie hurt? oh, is Maggie hurt?" she cried in fresh grief. "Oh, is it possible that I have done wrong?"

"Come here, Peggy, and tell me all about it, and I will soon know if you have done wrong," I said, drawing her towards me. "It's for your own good I ask it, and to get at the real thieves."

It took some close reasoning on my part to convince Peggy that she was justified in betraying the woman in widow's mournings; but when I expressed a conviction that the tout was no more a relation of Maggie Gray's than I was, the story came out clear and simple from beginning to end. When she had finished I brightened perceptibly; and the old man, hastily taking that as a good sign, said—"Now you understand it all, and see that Peggy had nothing to do with it, so you can go and catch the thieves, and leave Peggy here."

"That would scarcely do," I gravely rejoined; "Peggy must go to the Police Office with me."

A look of haggard despair crossed the old man's face like a flash.

"No, no! that would never do. Peggy's the bread-winner; she mustn't be taken away. I'm the responsible person in this house; Peggy's only the mother, and of course must be considered as acting under my influence. The grate is brushed and the house clean, and the washing can stand over for a week or two. Do, there's a dear, kind man! do take me instead. I'll look something like a prisoner; but that poor child——"

"You will indeed, for I must take you too," I said, with some reluctance.

"You'd better take us all," cried the old man, with the sharp energy of despair. "Take Bob, too, when he comes to dinner, and Jessie when she comes from school, and Peg there, the cat, and Chirrup the canary. They're all equally guilty. For shame, man! I've seen many hard-hearted monsters, but you beat them all."

"It is not for me to argue that point, but simply to do my

work ; and if you think yourself aggrieved, consider how much more the servant, Maggie Gray, must think herself, for until it is proved that this unknown woman is not her mother, I must take and detain her too."

"But she is innocent," burst in Peggy, in horror and dismay. "Oh, surely you can never take her to prison?"

I replied that at present that was impossible, Maggie being scarcely well enough to be moved, but that at the same time I felt sure that the arrest would be made.

I searched the house well—no difficult task—and then started with the policeman and our prisoners for the Central Office. I thought Peggy's story rather improbable, and had not hesitated to say so, a circumstance which appeared to cut her to the heart. We took the back way by Buccleuch Street, Potterrow, and Horse Wynd, to avoid commotion and attracting crowds, and I soon had occasion to think the arrangement a fortunate one. As we were crossing the Cowgate from Horse Wynd, Peggy suddenly started and exclaimed—

"There ! there ! there's the woman that gave me the half-crown !"

A woman in mournings moving on before us started right round at the sound of Peggy's voice, and no sooner sighted the policeman and me than she took to her heels. I got her at the top of the close, and hustled her into the Police Office, in which she was at once searched and asked for her address. The search revealed nothing but a few coppers and a common door key ; and to my surprise she at once named as her address a respectable lodging in Lothian Street, kept by a woman bearing the same name as herself. Upon inquiry at this place, I found that Bell spent much of her time in writing and answering letters, which easily found her, owing to the name "Murray" being on the door, and had a shrewd guess at her means of livelihood. I found, too, that at intervals "Mrs Murray" was visited by her "husband," and instantly began to devise a scheme for liming him as well. After some thinking, I inserted an advertisement in the *Scotsman* running thus :—

"Found, a door key. The owner may have it by applying to Mr Roberts, grocer, No. — Cowgate."

One or two written notices to the same effect I had inserted in shop windows in the locality, and at last one of these produced fruit. A man called for the key, but was told that it could not be given him till Roberts himself came

in. I was then warned, and got down in readiness, and saw him receive it. He went up the Cowgate for some distance, plunged into a low entry and got through to a cellar in a yard behind, which he opened with the "lost" key, and then entered, closing the door behind him. When he again appeared he had a heavy parcel in his hand, which he hastily attempted to conceal under his coat the moment he sighted my familiar features. I advanced and fastened his wrist to my own, after handing the parcel to my chum, and then he spoke for the first time.

"What do you want with me?"

"Only to take you to your wife," I pointedly replied. "In the poorhouse they separate them; we are more merciful."

He collapsed abjectly; and the secret of his dejection was revealed at the Office when the contents of the parcel and the other articles dug up in the cellar were displayed, consisting, as they did, of *all the stolen property* but the plated spoon taken from Peggy the milk girl, which I suppose they had thought not worth retaining. Peggy was detained a day or two, but then released on ample bail.

Bell Murray proved less of a monster than I expected; for when the case came to trial, she fully absolved Peggy of all complicity in the crime—so far as knowledge of evil was concerned. She wished to do the same in regard to her husband, but we could hardly take her evidence upon that point, and they went to the Penitentiary for ten years together. Peggy, I have no doubt, will be a real scrubbing and scouring mother by this time; but whether she is or no, I have no doubt she is still what her grandfather said, "honest and good."

AN UNBURIED BURGLAR.

THE first time that I saw the pocket-knife of which I now write, and noted its peculiarities, was when we had its esteemed owner, Anthony Potter, otherwise "Colty," up on suspicion, and I was relieving him of his unnecessary valuables before having him locked up. It bore no name; indeed, a professional thief has seldom any use for his real name, and hastens to get rid of it, and then religiously shuns it as long as he curses the world by existing. As for signing a will, of course, a thief needs no name for that, never having as much as a small toothcomb to bequeath to his sorrowing relatives. But though 'Colty's' knife bore no name, it had peculiarities enough to distinguish it from the many other knives coming into our keeping, otherwise I should not have had this story to tell. The blade was much worn by tobacco whittling, of which it smelt strongly—so much so, that in taking it from Colty's pocket, I felt constrained to say—"You'll have no tobacco for a while, so you'll not need this," which politeness was rewarded with a most malignant scowl.

One side of the buckhorn handle was nearly all gone, leaving but a scrap at the end, and nothing but the flat brass beneath, shiny and clear with friction, in his pocket. On this brass side some one—perhaps Colty himself, in an idle moment—had scratched the effigy of a man in the act of being hanged on a gibbet. I thought it had been designed to represent Colty's probable end, and may have said so to the owner, but if I did I was wrong. Colty was reserved for a more signal distinction, and one which few burglars can hope to attain.

Little or nothing came of the arrest on suspicion, and in a few days Colty got back his knife, and coppers, and fag end of tobacco, and went forth once more to conquer and subdue.

Things did not prosper with him for some time after, and he and a beloved pal named Joe Eggers, at length, with many curses, decided to cut all connection with Edinburgh, and remove to a better sphere for their abilities. The journey of

course was on foot ; and we might have been blessed by his prolonged absence had he and Eggers, otherwise "The Daisy," not chanced to pause behind a hedge some miles south of Edinburgh to lounge and sleep in the sun. While in this retreat two men passed, evidently speaking of a grim and stately-looking house near by, called Ellerton Hall.

"The Major made all his money in India, and has as much gold and silver plate in that place as would stock the mint," said one.

"And he's quite a character, isn't he? old and miserly, though he hasn't a wife or relative to leave it to," remarked the other.

"Yes, and stingy as possible ; keeps only women instead of men servants, though the place is worth better watching. He's got a dog, though ; a great brute of a mastiff as big as——"

The voices died away in the distance, and Colty, who had been awakened by the sound, heard no more. But what he had heard was enough to interest him deeply in Ellerton Hall and its contents. Leaving his companion wrapped in the calm and tranquil slumber of innocence behind the hedge, he made a tour round the house in question at a safe distance, and being satisfied that the subject was hopeful, returned and kicked his friend into wakefulness. The house in question, tenanted by Major Bartlemore, stood well back from the road, and nearly hidden by trees ; and though to the ordinary eye it might have seemed invulnerable as a fortress, the principal windows below being protected by iron bars, to the practised thief no such objection presented itself. There was a way into the house, and at the side farthest from the kennel of the mastiff, which Colty had inspected with deep interest ; and the intending burglar at once proceeded to lay the result of his investigations before The Daisy. Had Colty known all that was to come of that promising "plant," he and his companion would have passed on with a shudder of profound thankfulness, and left the plate to some other thief with more daring and hardihood ; or had he even known of one eccentricity of the Major, besides that of keeping a large mastiff, I question much if he would have ventured within the walls of the house, though he had been offered the Crown jewels as the prize. But burglars are but men, and the risks and dangers of their calling have never been sung by poet, or wept over by biographer, so it is not surprising that they saw not an inch before their noses

and grasped at the chance with the eager avidity of gamblers or fortune hunters.

After deciding to break into Ellerton Hall, Colty and The Daisy were compelled to return to Edinburgh. They had no tools, no friends, and no money wherewith to buy them; but when did the want of money step between a man and his fate? Colty had set his heart on the Major's treasure, and realised his difficulties only to overcome them. From a reset in their power they borrowed canvas overalls to give them a workman-like appearance; and with these covering their shabby clothes, they boldly walked into a builder's yard and stole a sixty feet ladder. This ladder they carried between them out of the city to a plantation near Ellerton Hall, and then sat down beside it to wait for night.

"I wonder what the old woman at the cottage yonder could mean by sayin' that the Major was a queer man, and kept some queer pets?" said The Daisy reflectively, as they waited thus after a tour of inquiry in different directions; "she sort o' laughed when she said it, too."

"Oh, I know—it'll be parrots or something. He's been in India, and would most likely bring 'em with him. Or maybe it's a monkey, or some sich beast. 'Course, if we see any we may lift them, if they're quiet. They'll bring a bob or two from some o' the show folk or caravans."

"I think we'd better let them alone," quickly suggested The Daisy; "parrots bite awful, and so does monkeys, to say nothing of the noise. Let's stick to our own line, and lift just what'll go easy into the melting-pot."

"Just like you; you have no enterprise," growled Colty; and there the subject dropped.

By using their eyes and making many prying investigations, including one begging expedition to the kitchen door of the Hall, the intending burglars had learned pretty accurately the position of the various rooms, and the parts unoccupied by night. As soon as it was late enough and dark enough, which at that time was not till after midnight, they shouldered the ladder, got into the garden behind the house, carried it softly to the wall without arousing the watch-dog in front, raised it to a bedroom window, utterly ignoring the barred or shuttered windows below, and speedily entered the house.

Unfortunately for the success of their attempt, many of the adjoining doors were locked or barred, and they were thus confined to a limited area of the house. But enough was got

to satisfy such needy and toolless robbers, including two Indian idols, representing squat figures about eighteen inches high, which being coated with silver, they thought a great prize, worth their weight in shillings. Fastening these and the other articles of value into a bed-cover, they were about to make them up into two compact bundles, when the watch-dog woke and began to howl and bark furiously.

For a moment or two the burglars stood stock still, in hope that perfect silence would convince the animal that it had been mistaken; but finding then that the terrific uproar continued, and was likely to wake the inmates, Colty impatiently said—

“Take that bed-cover and run down and throw it over the brute’s head, and put your knife in its heart. It’s the only plan; and while your round there, I’ll get the bundles down ready for lifting. Quick now, or we’ll have to bolt without a maik’s worth.”

The Daisy vanished like a shadow from the open window, and after a little Colty was pleased to notice that the furious barking dwindled to a smothered growl, from which he rashly concluded that The Daisy was hard at work in front of the house. Now The Daisy, far from executing the command, had not got farther than the foot of the ladder directly below the window, a circumstance which requires some explanation. The moment The Daisy’s feet touched the ground, he was startled to see one of the dark windows of the building suddenly show a light within, as if one of the inmates had been awakened, and had started out of bed to light a lamp and learn the cause. Uncertain for a moment what to do, The Daisy stood thus transfixed directly beneath the window from which he had descended, and waited to see if the light would go out, or the window be thrown up to give egress to a night-capped head; but a moment or two later a more dreadful object attracted his attention and made him stand on his guard, bed-cover in hand and knife in teeth. The mastiff, furious at being so long unnoticed, had made a successful tug at his chain, not sufficient to break the bond, but to move the heavy kennel a few inches from the spot. A second effort, though nearly strangling it with the tightened leather collar, moved the kennel a little further, and thus in a few moments it turned the corner of the house with flaming eyes and protruding tongue, dragging its wooden house after it, and evidently panting to gobble up the amiable Daisy alive.

The great brute quickened its movements desperately the

moment it sighted the dark shadow against the wall, growling and gasping, but making no louder sound ; and in a short time it would have come to a fight or a flight, had not the unconscious Colty far above at that precise time been struck with a brilliant and speedy way in which to convey the bundle containing the heavy silver-plated idols to the ground. The ground immediately below the window, he had remembered, was a garden plot, soft and noiseless as a sponge, and he could not see any need for lugging down the ladder a bundle weighing one cwt., when he had his own to carry as well, and could simply drop the heavy one into this soft garden mould. He staggered to the window with the bundle ; and knowing from bitter experience that The Daisy was quite able to take care of himself, he rolled out the bundle on to the sill, jerked it well out from the wall, and thus sent it flying earthward, a clean drop of sixty feet. Everything in this world has its use ; and heathen idols, though but bronze, silver-plated, may have a good mission to accomplish. Colty listened for the fall of the plunder, and was rewarded by hearing a dull, crashing thud far below. Yet the sound was scarcely that which he had expected ; and being followed by a deep groan, it so far excited his curiosity as to induce him to drop the second bundle on the floor, and peer out into the darkness. He saw enough to make him suspect that all was not right—the prostrate outline of a man on the ground close to the wall below, and a moving animal dragging a heavy object after it towards that figure ; and without a moment's delay Colty sprang to the ladder, and began rapidly to descend. Half way from the bottom he paused and stared down with a creeping sensation crossing his scalp, and a clammy perspiration beginning to ooze from his forehead and spine. Below the window lay his beloved pal The Daisy, with one of the corners of the bundle—that which contained the heaviest idol—resting on his hollowed skull, and the dark blood oozing from his nostrils and every other crevice by which it could find easy outlet. Within a yard of the felled man was a huge mastiff, fastened by a chain, but nevertheless creeping steadily nearer with its eyes on Colty, and its tongue and teeth evidently watering to devour him.

“ Good God ! what on earth could have made the stupid get in below when I dropped the bundle ? ” exclaimed Colty, with a sickening alarm which made him reel dizzily on his perch. “ I’ve gone and croaked him, by gum ! I see how it has happened. That brute of a dog has chased him back and

cornered him there while I was dropping it, and he hadn't time or the nouse to shout out. Blast you, if I don't take the worth on it out of your skin! I'll have your heart's blood, you ugly fiend, for going and killing one o' the best prigs that ever stole crabshells to walk on!" and thus vociferating under his breath, Colty got out his knife—that which I have already described—unclasped it with his teeth, and warily began to descend the ladder, up which the dog was now leaping and straining. "I'm a-coming, you blasted murderer, I'm a-coming to cut your throat!" he hissed, as the dog began to bay and bark more furiously than before, and some windows rattling up close at hand warned him that he had little time to lose. "When I'm done with you, you won't be so precious greedy to come to grabbing distance."

When within ten feet of the ground, Colty leaped suddenly outwards from the ladder and landed on his feet some distance behind the growling mastiff; then when it leaped round, he let it get the full length of its tether, and then hurling a great stone into its open jaws, rushed forward and stabbed it vengefully in the side. The next moment, before he could wheel or leap back, with a frightful howl the dog had him by the shoulder, and he was forced to drop the knife, that he might have both hands to choke it off. At this juncture an alarm bell suddenly clanged out within, followed by the appearance of Major Bartlemore himself at one of the windows, with a double barrelled gun in his hand. There was a shout, a dead pause, and then an explosion, and Colty heard a ball whiz past his ears in a manner too emphatic to be mistaken. He wrenched his shoulder from the frightful teeth of the mastiff, and without thinking of his knife, or the plunder, or anything but saving life and liberty, Colty dashed for the nearest wall, ran up it like a goat, and was gone.

During all the commotion and uproar, The Daisy had never once moved; but as soon as the servants had armed themselves, and thrown on clothing, they issued forth, headed by the Major, gun in hand, and picked up the prostrate thief, whom the old soldier at first joyfully took credit for shooting. A closer inspection of his injuries, however, speedily proved that Daisy was suffering not from a bullet, but a fractured skull. The plated idol had descended with the force of a cannon-ball straight on to his hard head, which it had indented in a way which, had the man lived, would have puzzled many a phrenologist. The Daisy was still alive, but quite insensible; and though he wa.

as speedily as possible driven in to Edinburgh Infirmary in a cart littered with straw, at which place he lingered for some weeks, it could not be said that he ever recovered his faculties. He let out enough in his wanderings to indicate that he had not attempted the robbery alone; and as the Major spoke of a second man escaping over the wall, and sent in the knife found near the spot—not *The Daisy's*, which was found in his teeth—I anxiously strove to recollect where and how I had before seen the knife. Think as I liked I could not recall the circumstances, and had almost given up trying, when some one chanced to remark in the Office that Colty had never been seen since the robbery, when the whole scent flashed upon me like an inspiration, and I exclaimed—

“Why, that old knife is Colty’s! Strange that we did not think of him sooner, for he was seen with *The Daisy* long before this affair came off.”

“Oh, but Colty has had nothing to do with this affair. I know for a fact that he left the city a day or two before the robbery took place,” was the rather damping reply. “Besides, he might have lost the knife or lent it, or had it stolen from him—nothing more likely. It does not follow, because his knife was found out there, that he carried it to the place, and left too hurriedly to pick it up.”

I said nothing, but determined to follow up the clue, in hope of, perhaps, strengthening the case as I proceeded, and was soon rewarded by hearing beyond doubt that Colty had been in the city, in hiding, and somewhat disabled, a day or two after the robbery. But this information did not place the rascal in my hands. I searched high and low for him, but so fruitlessly that I at last concluded that he had left the city. Yet there was something so sudden and mysterious about his disappearance that I had a lingering suspicion that he was cleverly hidden. Of this suspicion nothing came for about three weeks, when in passing along the South Bridge, I chanced to glance down Infirmary Street, and swiftly noticed, among the motley crowd there gathered awaiting the hour for the admission of the friends of patients, Colty’s wife. I was past the street before I had thought much of the circumstance; then I started and pulled up before a draper’s window, and had a good think while apparently absorbed in studying the beauties of the latest foppish necktie or stand-up collar. The woman, I knew, had not noticed me, and I thought I would wait a little, and learn what relative she was so concerned about as to wish to see. That

she should be in Edinburgh, and her husband out of it, was a thing I could not for a moment believe. He battered her regularly within an inch of her life, I believe, but she was never a day away from his side; indeed, Colty often bewailed the fact that he could not shake her off. As soon as I saw the crowd crush within the opened door, I moved down to the gate and tackled the porter—

“Did you notice a woman with bare head, broken nose, and red shawl go in just now?”

“I did, sir. She’s in seeing her husband, isn’t she? Her name is Brown? eh?”

“She might call herself that, and him too; for they have a curious habit of changing their names; but have you any idea what is wrong with her husband?”

“Bitten by a mad dog, I think. Lacerated shoulder, but not dangerous,” promptly answered the man. “The woman tried to smuggle in some whisky to him the first time she came, but I took it from her and she hasn’t tried it again, though, to be sure, I always search her.”

“Bitten by a dog?” I echoed, with the most intense satisfaction. “I think I shall go in and see him; I have a deep interest in his health. Which ward, please?”

“Number 8, Surgical Hospital.”

“Number 8? Good gracious, and The Daisy died in Number 7! No wonder I could not find the rascal, with him hiding under my very nose.”

This last was my thought, but I did not utter it aloud. It would have made me look too foolish. A decent fool will often pass for a wise man if he has only the sense to hold his tongue.

I marched down to the Surgical and up the stair to No. 8 ward, which I entered in time to see Colty rise to a sitting posture in bed to partake of tea, with his wife looking on and perhaps envying him of the comfort. I appeared to disturb him, for he dropped the basin and bread with a sharp “D—n it! there’s M’Govan,” which drew a similar expression of affection and esteem from his wife.

Colty objected to leave his snug quarters, loudly asserted that to move him would be as good as taking his life; but when I referred the matter to the house surgeon, the truth came out, which was that Colty, suspected of imposing on the institution, had been frightened by the threat of a burning operation on the morrow, and had really agreed to leave that night. I therefore

assured him that his shoulder would be well tended in prison, and marched him off.

Poor Colty! had he been anything but a burglar, he would have been to be pitied. To understand his anguished feelings, it must be understood that, in the death of *The Daisy*, he had suffered a keen personal loss, the dead thief having owed him a round sum, lost in gambling, which there was now no prospect of recovering. And all this, with the loss of his knife and the subsequent tracing of himself to his snug hiding-place, he owed to the brute of a mastiff out at Ellerton Hall! Is it surprising that Colty should think of that dog every hour of the day, dream of it by night; and, whether sleeping or waking, curse it—tail, body, head, and teeth—to all time? Nay, is it to be wondered at that he even swore that the first visit upon leaving jail that he meant to pay would be, knife in hand, to that brute at Ellerton Hall?

After an interval spent by us in vainly endeavouring to strengthen the evidence against Colty, he was brought to trial upon two charges—one a trifling theft, and the other the housebreaking. The second, as I had feared, had to be abandoned, and Colty drew a sigh of relief when the simple sentence was passed of nine months' imprisonment.

"I'll pay him back yet, and his dog too," he was heard to mutter, as he was led from the bar, evidently alluding to the Major, who had appeared in evidence against him; but as the rash words had not reached the judge's ears, they were allowed to pass unchallenged, and he left the Court without having his sentence augmented.

At the expiry of his term, Colty had his shabby clothes returned to him in exchange for the prison suit, and along with them received his knife, which I believe pleased him more than if he had been presented with a sovereign, though it would have been dear at threepence. With the chaplain's warnings and the governor's advice wringing in his ears, Colty went with his wife to their home in Blackfriars Wynd, walloped her well, and robbed her of fifteen shillings which she had saved for rent. He then bought a second-hand pistol and a bullet mould from a broker in St Mary's Wynd, saying that he had a brute who would not stop biting, and would be best put out of pain. With some lead spoons and an iron shovel, he then made some bullets, loaded the pistol, and with it and the knife treasured in his bosom, left Edinburgh for Ellerton Hall. Did no guardian angel whisper to him a warning as he trudged

the lonely road—a warning to turn, if he would see another sunset like that which was reddening the sky at his right? If it did it was unheeded. Yet if he had only had the sense to make inquiry, he would have learned that which would have dissuaded him more effectually than any warnings, that his foe, the mastiff, had ceased to exist. The truth is that the dog had never fairly recovered from the stab with Colty's worn and probably dirty-bladed knife. The wound had been trifling, but it had refused to heal, and but a week before Colty's release, had become so hopelessly bad that the poor brute had to be poisoned to end its sufferings. Colty knew nothing of this, and though it was unfortunate for him, it was a boon to the world. Colty waited patiently till midnight in the wood behind the house, and then got over the wall, cocked his pistol, and stole on stocking soles round to the kennel in front. There was a little moonlight, and Colty fully expected the dog to spring out the moment his shadow crossed the kennel mouth, but to his surprise there was no movement, no sound, no rattling of the chain. A closer inspection explained the cause—the kennel was empty, the chain lying rusting on the ground, and the leather collar gone.

“They've took him inside, most likely set him free in the passages, with the doors of the empty rooms open, so that he may watch where he's most wanted,” was probably Colty's reflection. “Never mind; I'll get at him just as well, though I should have to shoot him through the window. I'll get in somehow, and he'll not be long of hearing me, I swear.”

He slowly made the round of the building, but was rather disgusted to find that every window within reach but one was guarded without by strong iron bars. The solitary exception attracted his attention particularly; and by clambering up on the sill of this window, he was able to make a series of surprising discoveries. In the first place it was unfastened, but guarded within by a series of iron bars arranged much in the style of a strong gate. Between the window and this iron gate there was room for a man to stand, and on one of the shutters hung within easy reach a heavy key evidently intended to open the eccentric window protection. Colty stared at the whole open-mouthed, and then in all likelihood thought that he understood the whole contrivance.

“It's the Major's strong room, most likely; the place where he keeps his plate and jewels and treasure. What's to hinder me from lifting the sash of the winder, opening the thing with

that key, if it fits the lock, and then lifting more than I missed the last time? But, hist! What's that lying in the dark corner over there on the floor? It's like a beast—a big one, too. Good. I see it all now. It's the dog; the brute that I've come here to kill. He's been put in here to watch the treasure. Now, if I can only get in without waking him—just close enough to put the pistol to his ear—I'll treasure him!"

Very cautiously Colty raised the sash and stepped close up to the bars within to discover if the sleeping animal were really his old foe, but failing in that he took down the key hanging on the shutter, and gently pushed the curious gate inwards. Finding that the huge animal still slept, he reclosed the gate to make sure that it should not escape, and then, pistol in hand, was about to step across to the obscure corner, when his heels suddenly slid under him, landing him, with a heavy thud, in a sitting posture on the glassy floor. Had he had time to think of it, he would then have seen that the floor was covered with a smooth iron plate littered with sawdust, and that the wall of the apartment had been similarly protected; but the sleeping animal chanced to wake at the sound of his sudden drop, and then, as it raised its huge head and glowing eyes, Colty sat gasping with horror, unable to move or utter a sound.

"Good God! it's a tiger, a real living Bengal tiger!" he probably groaned, leaping to his feet and slipping, scrambling, and stumbling in mad haste backwards towards the iron gate guarding the window, as the animal with low growls advanced from its corner upon him. "Good heavens! what am I to do? I've heard of some coves fixing them with their eye, but, Lord help me, this one's eye is near as big as my head."

The tiger advanced, licking its lips as a cat might over a cowering mouse, and in desperation the unhappy burglar had levelled the old pistol at its forehead and drawn the trigger. Alas! for the reputation of St Mary's Wynd and its brokers—the pistol missed fire! The snapping of the trigger, far from awing or scaring the huge beast, seemed but to irritate it; and after crouching back like a cat for a moment or two, while Colty sank back fainting with terror against the bars, it was through the air with a bound, and in a moment had his bones crunching in his teeth. An awful yell, wild and piercing as human throat could emit, rent the air; but though it was heard through the house, no one attended to it, or left their bed to ascertain the cause. Thus the Bengal man-eater had everything its own way, and when its cage was entered in the morn-

ing, Colty had ceased to have a bodily existence. His clothes, it is true, were there, and his knife; but he himself was gone, though there was abundant evidence in the place that he had not left his clothes of his own accord. There was nothing to speak of, of Colty to bury; and though he did no good in life, he had in dying conferred the only possible boon upon surviving humanity—saved it the expense of burying him. As for the tiger which had thus proved such a blessing to the world, it lived happily for many years; but having acquired a taste for flesh other than that of cows, it one morning, in an unguarded moment, ungratefully snapped off one of the Major's arms, who thereupon ordered it to be shot—a clear proof of how even a peaceable and good-natured tiger may be corrupted and brought to an untimely end by intercourse with a criminal. The circumstance points its own moral.

CAUGHT IN A GREY COAT.

ONE summer—I think towards the end of May, but certainly when the days were both bright and long—Joss Robson, a Glasgow criminal of both daring and dexterity, was “wanted” particularly by me in Edinburgh. Joss was a convict, his last sentence having been five years’ penal, and had shown himself ungrateful for his ticket-of-leave, not only by failing to report himself, but by at once resuming his old trade, and helping to break into a clothier’s shop in the New Town, from which shop goods worth above a hundred pounds, as well as some cash and bank notes left in the till, had been removed. Glasgow is a cheap place for many things, and to that city I turned my eyes in hope of tracing some of the plunder. Of course, Joss himself had prudently left Edinburgh; indeed, it was his sudden absence which first led me to connect him with the robbery, which suspicion was confirmed by subsequent gleanings and siftings. I spent a day in the western metropolis in company with Johnny Farrel, and actually did discover, not only one or two articles from the plunder, but undoubted evidence that Joss himself had been the seller. There were many peculiarities about the man’s appearance to impress it upon the memory, and though I had seen him but once before, I had little doubt that I should be able to identify him at a glance when we met. Joss had a prominent forehead; eyes round, dark, and intelligent, and hair a reddish brown.

There was nothing of the brutalised convict about him now that his hair had grown; indeed, he resembled a dapper clerk or draper’s assistant more than a desperate criminal. To Johnny Farrel, of course, he was perfectly well known, having been one of his “bairns” from the moment his first conviction had been scored against him; therefore I am justified in gently easing off the weight, or part of the weight, of any complications that followed from my own shoulders on to those of my friend.

After a day’s hard work in Glasgow, I returned to this city to

await results, while Johnny so successfully continued his work, that in two days he had come upon a direct clue to the den in which Joss had burrowed. In wandering up Little Dove Hill one forenoon, with the intention of seeking Joss in his den, he was agreeably surprised to see that gentleman walking down in his direction, attired in a new grey summer overcoat. With quickened strides Johnny crossed the street to intercept the shop-breaker, who from a calm and contented smoke at his short pipe, awoke to the fact that a detective, sharp-eyed and eager enough to mean business, was advancing upon him. In a moment he had scented danger, dashed down his pipe, and turned to fly; but then Johnny had him in his grasp, and would have retained him but for a sudden grappling of Joss, and a deft hooking of the legs from his foe. Farrell fell heavily, and while he was scrambling to his feet, Joss turned and flew like the wind. For some distance Farrell kept him in sight, till Joss darted into an entry having more than one outlet by greens and stairs to a street running parallel. Farrell had more than once lost his quarry at the same rookery, and by the identical means upon which Joss now seemed to desperately rely; and as experience teaches, he did not follow the shop-breaker into the entry, but, flying on, turned the corner and reached the next street, down which he ran, keenly on the outlook for the fugitive. A full minute passed without a trace of Joss, and Farrell was beginning to believe him lost for the time being, when a glimpse of the familiar grey overcoat slipping stealthily and fearfully from an entry further down rewarded his astute calculation, and sent him thundering down on the wearer before he had time to quicken his steps to a run. This time the man made no attempt at violence, which was, perhaps, as well for himself, seeing that Farrell's blood was up, and a real policeman's staff in his hand, which he would now have been perfectly justified in using. The thought that all was not right did not once cross Farrell's mind; and when he had handcuffed the prisoner's wrist to his own, and conveyed him to the Central, and the prisoner, on being taken before the Superintendent, as is usual, was requested to uncover his head, a fresh confirmation seemed to crop up. The cleanliness and brightness of the silk lining to the felt hat of the prisoner caught Farrell's eye; and glancing into it he was pleased to find legibly printed upon it, in letters of gold, the name and address of the Edinburgh clothier's he was charged with breaking into. A close inspection of the grey tweed overcoat also

revealed the same address printed as legibly upon the black suspender inside the back of the collar. The case seemed now so clear that the usual questions were put only as a matter of form; and regarding the first the prisoner seemed to think so too, for he said rather resignedly—

“My name? You know it well enough already, don’t you?”

“No insolence, please,” sharply interposed the Superintendent. “Your name?”

“Joshua Robson,” answered the prisoner with the utmost calmness; then adding, with wonderful politeness, “I did not mean to be insolent, sir; I did not, really.”

“Any trade?”

“Oh, yes; but I am not working just now,” hurriedly answered the prisoner. “I would rather not say anything about myself.”

“Please yourself,” drily observed his questioner. “You will be taken through to Edinburgh to-morrow.”

He was taken away and locked up; and then by overhauling the list of goods reported as stolen from the Edinburgh clothier, Johnny made sure of his case by finding the identical articles found upon the prisoner there enumerated. The next morning, accordingly, the prisoner was brought through still wearing the coat and hat; and as I was in the Office when they arrived, I was shown the prisoner with some elation by Johnny, with the words—

“Here’s a man you’re anxious to see, to say nothing of the coat he wears.”

I looked the shuffling and shrinking prisoner full in the face for a moment in silence, and then said rather awkwardly—

“Why, *is* this Joss Robson?”

I must have looked either stupid or puzzled, for the query as well as the look elicited a hearty laugh from the Fiscal.

“Of course it is,” he promptly answered. “I thought you knew him, and had taken his portrait. Eh, Jamie, never boast of your memory for faces again.”

I stared at the prisoner a second time, and began to make out several of the features as recorded in my memory—the prominent forehead, round eyes, and reddish brown hair; yet though I had seen Robson but once, I was still dubious enough to say inquiringly to the prisoner—

“Well, Joss, you’ve got back again?”

The man stared, neither sullenly nor ill-naturedly, but with just the slightest opening of the eyes, as I imagined, and then answered, with calm indifference—

"Yes, I've got back."

Still a little doubtful, I said—

"You are Joss Robson, aren't you?" Whereupon he quickly answered—

"Yes; *he'll* tell you that;" and, as he indicated Farrel, Johnny added—

"Yes, I got a clyte in the dirt frae 'um that minded me o' auld times. He scented danger the moment he got his een on me."

I now concluded that my first interview with Joss had either been very profitless, or that his appearance had altered somewhat with the new and superior clothes he now wore; and without saying more to expose my own stupidity, as I thought it, I saw the case taken down and the prisoner locked up till next day, when he was remitted to the High Court on a well supported charge of shop-breaking and robbery.

By the time the trial came on I had become so familiar with the features of the accused that I sometimes faintly wondered that I should have hesitated when first he was brought before me; but I was nevertheless struck with a remarkable change in his manner. Instead of the old bullying and reckless bravado, there was a quiet and gentle manner, and in place of loud talkativeness, a reticence which it was all but impossible to break. The health of the prisoner had altered for the worse, it is true; his appetite was bad, and he often complained of weakness and a pain in his chest; but as he had during his former sentence been reported as a cunning malingerer, who would try any trick to escape working, little attention was paid to these hints. On the case being called at the High Court, the change in his demeanour was again remarkable. Formerly he had apparently prided himself upon his boldness in pleading "Not guilty," for the sake of displaying his wits in the shape of cross-examination of the witnesses; but now he looked wonderingly up in the judge's face, and said with curious simplicity—

"Which will be the best for me? If I plead guilty, will it make my sentence shorter?"

This speech was so little expected that for a moment the Court was taken aback; but after a pause for consultation he was informed that it would probably be to his advantage to plead guilty, when he quietly nodded his head, and said, somewhat wearily—

"Then I plead guilty to the charge."

The sentence was five years' penal servitude, which otherwise would have been seven, with the addition of the unfulfilled years of his first sentence. Thus his forethought saved him at least four and a-half years' imprisonment; yet the circumstance was so unusual that I opened my eyes and remarked to some one, "The world is surely coming to an end, for here is a sturdy rogue who can actually see more than an inch beyond the present."

Thus the matter rested; and I daresay thus it would have stood till the end of time, had I not chanced, some years after, to be in the Penitentiary at Perth, trying to get information which one of the convicts there alone could supply. My mission was a failure so far as the immediate object was concerned, for the man absolutely refused to open his lips; but in going through the place one of the upper warders chanced to say to me—

"Do you know a man called Joss Robson? He came from your place for house-breaking."

"I know him, or knew him at the time," I answered. "What has he done now?"

I fully expected an account of some brutal and unprovoked attack upon the harmless turnkey, in which Joss bore the lion's share of the work; but the man only said with a curious smile—

"What do you think of him now?"

"Think of him?" I echoed, trying to read the sceptical expression lighting my questioner's face. "How? in what way?"

"Isn't he a deep schemer, and lazy to the back bone?"

"Really, that's more than I could take upon me to say," I frankly replied. "Every thief is lazy enough, and deep too, as a rule."

"Yes; but what I mean is, don't you think him a shammer in regard to sickness—a malingerer pretending to be very weak just to get into hospital?"

"I've heard something of that kind about him during his first visit to this place, but what of it?"

"Why, this. He is in an hospital now—been so for months—and from shamming illness he has actually turned it to a reality. In truth, I do not believe he will recover."

"Were you sure he was shamming? What did the doctor say?"

"That's the curious thing. The doctor said with a smile, before he saw him, that he guessed what *his* trouble was,

remembering his reputation under the former sentence; but no sooner did he see him and examine him, than he took me aside and said, 'The man is undoubtedly ill, and has been so for many a day. One of his lungs must be nearly gone. He may not live out his sentence.'

"Humph! the old story; but I never thought a powerful rascal like him would dwindle into a consumptive," was my short comment. "Could I see him?"

"I am coming to that; indeed it was that made me ask you if you knew him. He seems to have heard a deal about you in this place and out of it—as who has not?—and taken a second notion of you; for more than once he has said, 'I don't believe I'll ever go out of these walls alive; but if ever M'Govan should be near here, I'd like to see him and speak to him.'"

I was not surprised. The request was not an unusual one; and I merely nodded, saying—

"I daresay he wants to let me know of some buried plunder which can be of no more use to him; or to set me on the track of the beloved pals who were engaged with him at the robbery, but who have been more lucky in eluding us."

Thus carelessly and somewhat callously reasoning, as it may seem, I was led to the prison hospital, where a thin shadow of a man lay, in whom I had the utmost difficulty in tracing a resemblance to my former prisoner, Joss Robson. Weak and wasted as he was, however, he seemed to have no difficulty in recognising me; for he held out his thin hand with a gladsome smile and a sudden rush of blood to his face, and then I said as cheerily as possible—

"Well, Joss, how are you getting on? I'm sorry to see you so low."

"Well, it's more than I am myself," he weakly returned, after a pause to raise himself and cough in an ominously hollow and hectic way, holding his hand on his breast as he did so. "I'll be glad indeed when it sets me free."

"How? Are they not kind to you here?" I inquired, thus interpreting a weary, weary look of pain which flitted for a moment across his sunken features.

"Kind enough—as kind as they need be to a dying man; for dying I am. What need to hide the truth? I'm not sorry or afraid either."

I was about to say something about such an end being a common one to crime—I had seen it so often—but I checked

the words just as they were escaping my lips. But the quick eyes of the patient were upon my face at the moment, and he seemed to *hear* the words unspoken.

"I know what you would say; that a convict or a criminal can expect nothing better: a bad beginning a bad ending," he eagerly observed; "but you're wrong—completely mistaken. This is not the end of crime—it is a broken heart;" and as he gasped out the words, with a pink spot on either cheek, and his scant breath coming in quick pants, I saw the tears creep slowly into his eyes, and there glisten till I thought them actually beautiful.

"A broken heart?" I echoed in amazement. "How so?"

"I don't know if I can tell you how so," he wistfully returned. "That depends on yourself. I've heard that you're not so bad as you're called; that there's such a thing as real sympathy under your sharp eye and rough voice; and as my story is as strange as it is true, I would like to tell it to you, and you alone. But I should not like it to be used against any one; as what good would another suffering do to me or any one? If you will promise me *that*, I will tell you all."

I thought for a moment, and then reluctantly answered—

"Has it anything to do with aught that I am bound to reveal as part of my duty?"

"Nothing."

"Then you have my promise."

He took my hand again and pressed it gratefully, and then resumed—

"I must begin at the beginning, by telling you that I was brought up at a place near Hamilton, where my companion at school was a boy who went by the nickname of 'Top.' He and I were seldom long separate in mischief or well-doing, and as a consequence I was called 'Peerie,' as much because we were companions as because we were said to resemble each other in appearance. At that time I was, if possible, the greater dare-devil of the two, and many a fault that 'Top' fell into was unflinchingly suffered for by 'Peerie;' indeed, we thought it manly to bear each other's punishments. But as we grew in years a change took place in our dispositions. I became quiet and studious, while he, for want of parents or controlling hands, ran wild and uncared for. We were almost drifting apart on that account, when he took it into his head that he would get on better in Glasgow, and thus we were completely sundered. As years passed, and we became men, I

heard of him from time to time, first that he had been convicted of theft, and then of more serious crimes, till at length it became certain to me that he had degenerated into a low criminal, a pest to himself and to all about him. Yet I always hoped that I had been mistaken or misinformed; and a thing that happened about that time seemed to strengthen the feeling. I got out of work—I was a silk shawl weaver by trade—and had to go to Glasgow to look for something to do. While I was gone, the landlord, who of course had not been paid, had the furniture seized, and was selling it off by roup when a man pushed into the crowd, after learning the particulars, and boldly ‘bought in’ the whole and handed the discharged receipts to my mother. My mother, poor body, was too agitated and tearful to notice much his appearance, but when he had gone, as suddenly as he appeared, she asked who he was and what he was like. The answer was, ‘He looked like a Glasgow chappie, and wad have passed for your ain son;’ ‘deed, it’s my belief it was naebody but that ne’er-dae-weel ‘Top.’”

“Excuse me,” I here interposed, with a strange interest beginning to thrill me through, and exclaimed: “But what was Top’s proper name?—I think you forgot to tell me that.”

“I am coming to that presently,” calmly and sweetly answered the sick man. “I have no doubt in my own mind that the sturdy stranger was ‘Top,’ though he never afterwards would admit the fact to me. I never forgot the strong and sudden pull he gave us out of our difficulties, a pull which I am certain added a few years to my mother’s life. But I am now coming to the most important part of all my life, and that upon which the whole of my troubles have hinged. Shortly after the death of my mother, I fell in love; yes, though warned against it by all the wiseacres in the place, I fell in love with a pretty face, a pair of witching and sparkling eyes, and the most graceful and beautiful form that ever walked this earth. Deliberately and with open eyes I allowed myself to become fascinated by a girl called Annie Lindsay, and from that hour to this can truly say I have never known what peace or rest is. Every one saw that she was a flirt, but I saw only that she was beautiful. Reasoning is useless when one is in love; and though she at first professed to laugh at me and my earnest words and looks, I persisted in nourishing the passion that was eating my life away, and at length got her to promise to marry me, and put on her finger an engagement ring which

I had carried in my pocket for months awaiting her decision. But though she had now pledged herself to be my wife, Annie caused me more trouble than ever. She seemed never to be happier than when flirting with others, and making me jealous and unhappy. Yet I loved her stronger and more fiercely than ever."

He paused to recover breath, and the look which he turned upon me as he breathed out the last pitiful words said, as plain as if he himself had added it, "I love her yet; I could never love another."

"The time came round at last when she was to be my wife, and I said to myself that she would sober down soon enough when in a house of her own. I took a nice house, and furnished it with everything I could think of that she would like. I gave her presents, too—a wedding-dress and a number of other things; but she suddenly left the place about a week before the wedding-day."

"Ran away?" I breathlessly interposed, powerfully moved by his dreadful eagerness to speak, fighting with the agitation and weakness that held him back.

"With the worst and lowest villain she could have picked off the streets of Glasgow!" he hotly breathed in reply. "Oh, God! if she had only married some one, or said she did not care for me, or remained a good hardworking girl, I could have loved her and protected her to her dying day. No matter though I did not get her; it was her happiness, not mine, that I was most anxious for; but to run away, to elope, and to such a life! I often wonder I did not die. I could not have believed that any one could have endured so much and live; could walk through the streets, and see the sun shining, and people smiling, and children laughing and jumping, and not throw themselves into the river, and have done with it."

"Did you ever hear of the poor girl again?" I gently inquired, seeing that his quickened breath was again threatening to choke him.

"Poor girl! Ay, that's the word—that's the name to give it," he chokingly returned, with his eyes again becoming misty. "She did not know the life she was going to, or she would have gone down to the Clyde, near our place, where it is pure and clear, and lain down in the deepest pool to welcome death as a friend and saviour. They tell me I went mad after she left the place, and used to go to the house I had taken, and touch the different articles I had bought, and say, 'Ay, I know Annie

will be pleased with that. Yes; there won't be a happier little wife in the world than she will be; there may be a richer, but there can't be a happier.' And when I woke out of my troubled dreams, Annie was lost sight of for ever by the low villain who had taken her away. But she was in Glasgow; everyone said that, and I believed it; and I even guessed what she was living by, though no one dared to breathe it to me. Well, I sold all the things, and put all my savings in my pocket, and went to Glasgow. I said nothing to anybody about what I meant to do, as I knew they couldn't think with my thoughts, and would only pity me or think me silly; but in my own heart I said, 'I'll find Annie, and pick her out of the mire, and make her a pure, good woman, though we should never be aught but brother and sister. She shall not die without being able to say she had one friend to wish her well.' But Glasgow is such a big place, and I knew so little of it, that I spent weary months, tramping day after day, night after night, through wynds and closes, yet never coming on any trace of her I wanted. I could have gone to a detective, and got him or the police to help me, but I shrank from telling any one of her shame or my weakness. One day I was trailing wearily through a close at the east end, when I met what I thought was almost a living image of myself. It was 'Top,' looking rather thievish and broken-down; yet I was glad to see him, and though he turned sharply away, as if ashamed to meet me, I caught him by the arm and said, 'For heaven's sake, Top, don't you turn away from me in my trouble; I need help, and you're the only one in all this city I'd trust to give it.' He saw that I was fearfully cut up and excited, and tried to soothe me, and took me into a wretched place near by, where I told him of my loss. Well, thieving may be a hardening thing, and Top might be brutalised and everything that is bad; but I tell you, when I went over all I had suffered, he shed tears of sympathy, which is more than I ever got from my own friends. Then he grasped my hand in the old kindly and boyish way, and said, 'I say, Peerie, I'm real right down sorry to hear this; but you try to forget the jilting little jade. She isn't worth one o' them tears you've got in your eyes now, not one, and if I met her, I tell you I'd kick her!' 'I can't sit and hear a word against her! Oh, Top, find her for me, and you may command every penny I have—my life itself!'—and when he saw me get so angry and excited, he said at last, 'Well, since you won't give her up as a bad lot, I'll help you to find her; but mind, it'll

have all to be done at night, because I can't show myself much through the day. In fact, Peerie, I'm not fit company for any honest man.'

"We began our search that very night, but somehow, I believe, she had got word of me being in town looking for her, and changed her lodging more than once, just as we were about to discover her. After a weary time spent in this way, Top one night appeared before me with the joyful intelligence that he had found her, adding that he did not think she could give us the slip this time, as she'd been down with a severe illness. We started for the place, but just as we turned into the street where she lived, Top gripped me hard by the arm, and said, 'By gum! there she is, coming down the street dressed like a queen. I s'pose she's been in debt, and they've shoved her out.' The moment he spoke I felt a thrill run through my heart which I feel sure I should have felt though I had passed Annie blindfolded in a crowd, and looking forward saw an evil-like shadow of my fair love boldly approach us, with artificial smile and painted cheeks. She came close to us, said something lightly to me, and then I wrenched at her hand and suddenly showed my face in the light of a street lamp, saying at the same moment, with all my heart in my mouth, 'Oh, Annie! I've been seeking you long, long!' Like a flash her painted cheeks became white as snow, and throwing up her arms in the air, she gave out a cry that rang in my ears for months after, and dropped in a faint at my feet. I lifted her in my arms, kissing her white lips as I did so, and with Top's help carried her to a house near by, where she lay ill for a week, with me watching her night and day. Then, as she did not get stronger, I got a great doctor, and he advised me to take her down the river to Dunoon. I went down there with her, taking a nice place with a garden full of pretty, pure flowers, and everything lovely and sweet, and saying she was my sister—as, indeed, she now was to all eternity—but Annie never held up her head. She—she——" and the voice of the narrator became choked and husky.

"Was taken away?" I suggested in an awed whisper.

"In my arms!" he ejaculated. "Yet I never thought she would die, and was full of plans for her future. One night she seemed weaker than usual, and I carried her to the window looking out on the broad Clyde, which was shining calm and beautiful in the moonlight, with the light of the Cloch shining out like a star far before. Then she whispered to me that she

was never to get better in this world, and kissed me and fell asleep. The last words I heard her say were, 'Oh, I wish I had been taken away when I was an innocent bairn!' I buried her down there, in reach of the sound of the waves. No one knows the spot but me, and I shall never see it again. When the green turf was laid over her, I knew that I had no more to live for. I came back to Glasgow, but a settled sadness came over me; and at last I arranged to go out to Australia as an emigrant. But a few days before the time for sailing, I was passing through an entry towards a place where I was likely to meet Top and bid him goodbye, when he ran full against me in a state of great excitement, and suddenly cried—'Oh, Peerie! The spots are after me! for the love of God put on my coat and hat, and lead them off, or I'm in for ten years at least!' In a moment I had his coat on, and crept out as he had bid me, thinking nothing of the sacrifice, it was so like old times, when we were tricky boys. I had forgot for the moment about us being thought like each other, and only said my name was Joshua Robson, when I heard the detective address me thus——"

"Then—good heavens!—you have suffered innocently!" I exclaimed, with my long pent-up excitement and emotion at last finding vent.

"Many suffer innocently in this world, so my case is not uncommon," he quietly returned with a deep-drawn sigh, which told me what suffering he alluded to. "My name is not Robson, but William Hanley. Joss Robson and Top are one and the same man."

"Believe me, I am sorry to hear it; and if anything that I can do to obtain your release——"

A firm raising of the wasted hand interrupted me.

"No, I shall be released soon enough," he quietly returned. "To you I am Will Hanley, but to all others I am still Joss Robson, the convict. But I come now to the reason which has prompted me to reveal all to you. Have you ever heard of one resembling me—in a word, of Top—as a criminal since my conviction for his crime?"

"Never; he cannot be in Scotland," was my decided reply.

"I'm glad of that. He almost promised to turn over a new leaf," sighed the sick man. "Yes, I'm glad of it; and if ever you meet him, tell him I was glad. Will you?"

With much emotion I gave the required promise, and after leaving the place, spent many an hour in trying to devise

a means of deliverance without breaking my promise to Hanley. But four days after I left he was lying as cold and still as the girl he had buried away down by the dark green woods and clear waters of Dunoon—gone where his devotion and quiet self-sacrifice would receive their eternal reward from One who Himself suffered “the just for the unjust.” Some years after, I met Joss, stout, healthy, and prosperous, at a horse show near Edinburgh, where he was making large purchases on his own account. I gave the man a long keen look, and then going up to him said—

“Well, Joss Robson, how are you?”

He paled a little, but recovering in a moment, said boldly—

“I am quite well, but you’ve made a mistake. My name is William Hanley.”

I smiled sadly, and then assuring him that he was in no danger, led him to an adjoining refreshment booth, and told him the end of his friend “Peerie,” otherwise Will Hanley. He was deeply moved by the recital, and when I had concluded, said frankly—

“I am Joss Robson! Do you wish to take me? I deserve it, by G—d!”

“No, Joss,” I quietly returned, “my business is to take thieves, not honest men. I am glad to see that you have got out of the pit, and would be the last to throw you into it again.”

He wrung my hand in silence; and thus we parted, never again to meet.

THE CAM'-STANED DOOR STEP.

THEY were enraged at me, and how their rage was excited was in this wise. There had been a robbery—very cool and daring—at a house in the suburbs, and of this robbery I had been able to make nothing. I could get neither the slightest clue to those who had done it, nor any trace of the plunder.

The thing had been done on a Sunday afternoon during church hours, and while there were at least two servants in the house, and all the things taken were from a cabinet in the drawing-room, in which they had been displayed to the best advantage. This drawing-room was on the first flat, and facing the road, so any one with quick eyes might have seen the gorgeous display and been tempted to appropriate there and then. This fact made me suspect the robbery to be the work of a mere tramp or hungry wanderer, and I fully expected to hear of the silver in a day or two in some of the pawn offices; but when not a trace of it appeared, I began to think that the robbery had been a planned affair—a suspicion which was strengthened by the fact that there were imprints of more than one pair of muddy feet on the drawing-room carpet.

The muddy footprints were of the colour of that thin and almost impassable pool which used to lie in wet weather on the Dalkeith Road between Preston Street and the house I am alluding to; I therefore concluded that the feet had *come out* from Edinburgh, and not merely delayed a little while going in.

In all my huntings and searchings I had fondly hoped that the plunder would not go to the melting-pot, and had boldly assured the distracted owner that he need not distress himself with that fear; and my reason for thinking so was that such of the articles as were of real silver were of no great weight, but all of them were very old and rare, and had a note of their age and history pasted upon them. There was, therefore, if the thieves could but understand it, a great deal more to be got for the things as they stood than by melting them. Some of them, indeed, were only of brass or bronze, covered with

curious groups and pictures in relief, and it was upon some of these that the owner placed a superstitious value. But as days went by and I got no trace of the things, I began to fear I had made a mistake. The owner, I am certain, if he could possibly have got at the thieves without our assistance, would have quietly compounded with felony, and brought back his things, rather than risk their destruction; but when he hinted at such a proceeding, I promptly warned him that he would only land himself as well as the thieves in prison, at which he sulked and growled not a little.

Now comes the reason of my amiable friends, the successful thieves, being enraged. From my want of success I reasoned that the robbery might have been planned and executed by strangers, and there was one stranger on my list of arrivals whom I had never laid hold of, and without evidence of any tangible kind I suspected him of having had a hand in the pie. This was a smart-looking fellow named Fred Oakes, but known more commonly by the name of Croppy. Possibly it was a twinkle of his eye, or an over demure expression of face when I was on the hunt, that first roused my suspicion, but I got out of temper at last, and went and grabbed him in the midst of his friends, in a lodging at the head of the Bow. A novice would have fought and set his friends on to fight; but Croppy was no novice, so he affected unbounded indignation, and said he would make it the dearest mistake I had ever made.

"What am I took for? and what evidence have you against me? that's what I want to know," he kept saying; and as I could not satisfy him on either point, his rage increased, and his protests became so voluble that at last I incautiously declared that I would book him for a long sentence, and therefore he had better bid good-bye to his friends accordingly.

There was great howling over this statement of mine, especially by Croppy's wife, who was a passionate young Glasgow girl of the tiger sort. The horrible threats and blood-curdling language which that awful woman heaped upon my head before I could get away her beloved, would have made some men faint on the spot. They were actually frightful enough to startle and horrify even me, and I felt quite a relief when I got Croppy safe into the Police Office and her out of hearing.

The worst of it was that Croppy engaged an agent to defend him, and when it was admitted that he was suspected of having a hand in the Ashgrove House robbery, this agent worked so

strenuously for his release that I began to fear I had made a laughing-stock of myself with my big threat. Croppy, I saw, would get off, and I exerted myself to the utmost to rake up his antecedents; and at length, with the greatest difficulty, got a man to come through from Leeds in time to arrest him for some cleverness in that town, just as he was discharged by us. Croppy was taken to Leeds on a charge of house-breaking, tried there, and sentenced to ten years' penal, as well as the unfulfilled years of his former sentence.

The rage of his "grass widow" was fearful. She not only used her tongue upon me whenever we met, but made no secret of her intention to have me "pitched into" upon the earliest possible opportunity.

"You'll not believe it till you find yourself lying stark dead some morning," she said, too enraged to notice her own blundering, or understand why I smiled; and then she gave me a fresh doze of her wonderful adjectives, enough to make one's hair stand on end.

I could have taken her away and got her to cool her anger by thirty days' oakum-picking, but I thought she was all noise and no action. I did not even mention to any one that I had been threatened, or had cause to fear an attack, I had seen so many cases in which these misguided wretches professed the most profound grief or lively rage at being deprived of a partner, and yet practically forgot it all in a week or two. This omission on my part was not unfortunate for me, but it was—very—for some one else.

At the time of Croppy's removal and trial at Leeds I had no idea why the horrid woman should have been so persistent in her vengeful rage, and, in truth, it was not till long after that I learned that Croppy was wholly and absolutely innocent of all knowledge of the robbery or connection therewith. Meg's rage then was consummated when, through an unjust suspicion and arrest, he had got enmeshed for an old crime, which, but for me, might never have been heard of. And the worst of it was that, while I was laughing at her threats, she really meant to put them into execution.

A day or two after the news of Croppy's conviction might be supposed to have reached this she-tiger, a letter signed "Knobstick" was sent in to the Office, stating that if M'Govan would, at twelve o'clock that night, go alone to the foot of a certain close in the West Port, a person would meet him who knew all about the robbery at Ashgrove House, and who was

willing to give all information against the persons concerned necessary for a conviction and the recovery of the plunder, provided that the said person could be ensured of a free pardon and the modest reward of £5 for his pains. If M'Govan did not go alone, or should "cut up treacherous," by bringing a posse of assistants with him, it was judiciously added, the whole of the generous offer would be withdrawn, and he would find nobody there to reward him for his pains.

I don't think I should have been quite so foolish as to walk into this nicely baited trap, though it is hard to tell, as I have before now walked into them when I ought to have known better. But as chance had it, I did not even see the letter till it was too late, as I was at that moment in a railway train returning from Newcastle, where I had been engaged upon a case of more importance. The letter stated that but one chance would be given me of accepting the offer, and that if I failed to turn up at the appointed time and place, the writer would be hundreds of miles away with his share of the plunder with him. The letter, therefore, was handed to M'Sweeny, who snapped at the bait like an unsuspecting mouse at toasted cheese.

"Sure, I can arrange terms wid them just as well as Jamie," said M'Sweeny in great exultation; "and faith if they don't agree to them, I'll have me eyes about me, and spot the appearance of the man who meets me, and nip him up the first time I meet him again. Then if I get the plunder, it'll be all through the papers before Jamie gets back. 'Through the activity and energy of Detective M'Sweeny, the property taken from Ashgrove House has been recovered, and the thieves captured.' How he'll sulk when he sees it! Begorra, he'll be ill for a week after, and unfit for duty for a month."

Only one consideration pulled him up, and even that was not unsurmountable.

"When they see it's me, they know how stern I am to deal wid, and may take fright, and never show face to me," he said; but after mature consideration, he decided that, in a dark close at midnight, with the aid of a brown wig, and with a little burned cork applied to his fiery whiskers, it would be possible to deceive them into the belief that M'Govan and not M'Sweeny approached their lurking-place.

"Once they spake to me, it won't matter," he reflected. "for then I can grip them and hould on till I get all I want out of them."

I had been troubled with cold for some weeks, and had worn a white muffler and heavy overcoat of blue cloth, and these notable points were not lost in M'Sweeny's disguise. He carefully soaped down the red bristles which Nature forced him to wear instead of hair, and drew on a dark wig, then trimmed and blacked his whiskers, and assumed a blue overcoat and white muffler, and so took his way at midnight to the West Port. Scarcely a person was abroad, even in that rough locality; and in the close itself, which has no outlet below, dead silence and darkness reigned. M'Sweeny's outline had probably been noted the moment he entered the close, but he was allowed to pass down to the bottom unmolested. A dark stair here yawned before him; and then beginning to feel uneasy, I suspect, he'd gently poked his head into the hole and said—

“Are ye there, Knobstick?”

Instantly there was a reply, but it came from a wooden knobstick, which caught him full in the eye with a swinging force that sent him reeling backwards against the opposite wall. So sudden and unexpected was the attack, that he had not time even to shout out when they were upon him. One deftly tripped him, and then the other two trod on him, kicked him, and pounded at him in perfect silence—at least perfect silence was evidently intended, for not an oath or a whisper escaped them till M'Sweeny, with a yell that nearly knocked over the frail houses, wriggled round among the busy feet, and grabbed one by the trousers, and then bit with all his might at a fleshy calf which chanced at the moment to come near his powerful jaws.

“Many's the time they've bit me, and, faix, what's good to give can't be bad to recave,” was his consoling thought as the awful cry of the injured ruffian broke the stillness. “I think I'd know that voice again, anyhow; and I'll hould on to this one though they should murder me alive. Murder! help! police!”

The shout was answered in an unexpected fashion, for the moment his strong Irish brogue fell on the ears of his assailants they ceased with one accord, and stared down into his face through the darkness in amazement, while one less cautious than the others cried out—

“Blast it! if we're not pitching into the wrong man!”

It was all they said, and in a moment more they dashed up the close and disappeared, one trouser leg ripping up like paper

in M'Sweeny's grasp, and so allowing the owner to escape. M'Sweeny sat up and tried to staunch the blood streaming from his nose, while the inhabitants of the adjoining houses, alarmed at the outcry, came flocking out to learn the cause.

"Don't ax me what's wrong when ye see I'm kilt—set on by murderin' villains," he dolefully answered, shaking his head and looking up at them with the one eye left open. "Och, och! but I'm bad! I don't believe I'll ever be on duty again. They've murdered the best detective that ever walked in shoe leather, and never a widow left to mourn his fate. Help me up, good paiple. If I'm to die, it may as well be on a soft bed as in a gutter. I came to do a man a kindness, and the first thing he said was to give me a bat in the eye."

Thus groaning and moaning, he was helped out of the close and sent home in a cab, after which a message was despatched to my house informing me of the attack, and connecting it by inference with the Ashgrove House robbery. I got this message the moment I entered the door, and with scarcely an hour's rest started off to see M'Sweeny, full of hope for the result.

Before, I had had absolutely no clue; now I had at least something to work upon, if it was only the marks of M'Sweeny's teeth on the man's leg. There might be other marks as well, for M'Sweeny, in his doleful account of the attack, admitted that he had used his feet more than once "in a ginerall way" among the surrounding legs. My first visit was to the Bow, where dwelt the disconsolate "grass widow" of Croppy, but I found that she had been gone for three days—exactly one too many—and was then far south in England. To this day I believe I owed the attempt to her, but, knowing that I would suspect her first on account of the threat, she had taken care to go away before the attack, with sufficient ostentation to make her absence a matter easily proved. This prop in the case being knocked away, to what was I to turn?

There was not at that time another male lodger in the house, but I had expected that, and left the place resolved to return at a more convenient season. Perhaps I even said so in leaving, but, as it turned out, I had no occasion to go back, on account of the following curious piecing together of strange clues.

In descending the stair at the head of the Bow, I remembered that the mother of the she-tiger who had united her destiny with that of Croppy, kept a lively house in the

World's End Close, further down the High Street. Many a time I had had the old hag through my hands, and I knew but too well that I would get but little out of her if she could help it, yet I resolved to visit her den. She had plenty of room for lodgers, and I had now the number of the assailants—three—as well as the other trifles already noted to guide me.

The old woman answered the door herself, and stood there blocking the entrance, and scowling at me and my temporary assistant, till I gently intimated that I wished to go inside and have a look at her lodgers, when she volubly exclaimed—

“Lodgers? I haena haen a lodger for dear kens the time. The last o’ them left me near a week ago.”

Nevertheless, in I would go, and of course I went first to the kitchen—which in these places generally takes the place of the public coffee-room in an hotel—and there I found the breakfast things still on the table. The cups and mugs from which the coffee had been drunk were heaped together in the middle of the table as for washing, and plates to count by there were none; but there were other things quite as good—namely, the backbones and other remains of three red herrings.

“How is this, Maggie?” I said, after noting that the herring bones lay at three separate parts of the table. “You’ve surely had company to breakfast this morning?”

“Ou, ay; there was a man cam’ in for his breakfast; but he’s a stranger, and had to be gaun as sune as he was dune,” she said, with affected coolness.

“Three, ye mean, Maggie, my wuman?” I observed in gentle correction. “A herrin’ the piece, ye ken. Naebody ever eats mair, unless they want to drink a’ day after it.”

Maggie, however, resented correction warmly, and swore by the bones of her father, and many things much more sacred, that she had given breakfast to but one man. I was glad to see her so strong in her assertions. Your out-and-out liar is a great help to the puzzled detective. Before I had doubted—now I was certain. On the table, beside the herring bones, I picked up a darning needle with a thread of grey worsted run through its eye.

“Been darning your stockings, Maggie?” I asked.

Her answer was a string of adjectives, and a sudden grab at the needle, which, however, I held back out of her reach.

“Ou, ay, I was daein’ just that,” she said, recovering herself, and probably regretting her tell-tale excitement.

"Let's see them," I added ; but Maggie could not oblige me. She had, in fact, not a darned stocking to show, and her excitement over the trifle made me resolve to keep the needle. Then Maggie got loud in her protests. It was the only "ane in the hoose," and she might need it any time. She "daured" me to take it, till at last I said I would be content with the thread of worsted, and gave her back the precious needle, though she did not appear a whit more pleased at the concession. From the kitchen I then turned to the bedrooms, and in two beds in one of these I found the exact impression of three persons—two in one bed and one in the other. The places, indeed, were yet warm, as the clothes had never been turned down or the room aired.

"How's this, Maggie?" I said, rather more sharply than I had yet spoken; "the beds are warm. I thought you said no one slept here last night?"

"No a soul has slept in this room for a week," she solemnly asserted, as soon as she had had time to make up the lie. "Ye jist think it's warm because there's a lum at the back o' the bed. That's the warmest place in the hoose."

"Oh, indeed. And what of the other bed? There's no lum behind it?" I answered, having ascertained that it stood against a mere partition of lath and plaster.

"Oh, I sleepit in that ane myself," she cunningly returned.

"Then who slept in the kitchen bed? There's been some one in it," I remarked; upon which Maggie took refuge in a storm of abuse, which would have irritated me had I not been so overjoyed at stumbling on a clue. I contented myself with searching the bedroom and all the other places thoroughly, and soon convinced myself that the birds had fled. Not a rag or an old boot belonging to them had been left; and the very fact that they had risen early and partaken of breakfast together pointed to an unusual journey. Were the three men I wanted already "hundreds of miles away," as the decoy letter had hinted? I thought not, for it is only after rare windfalls that the funds of three thieves will "run to" a long railway journey. Supposing them not hundreds of miles away, in what direction had they turned their virtuous nebs? I could not even guess; for, be it remembered, I knew nothing of the men's names, their appearance, dress, or antecedents. They were as yet absolute blanks to me, and not one of Maggie's neighbours, as I knew, would enlighten me in the least.

While I was debating this point in my mind, my eye chanced

to fall upon a picture of a street in Dundee which was pasted above the kitchen mantelpiece—I think it was a view of the High Street, with the Pillars and Town Clock in the centre. There was no other picture in the room, and, thinking there might be a hide behind it, I speedily removed it with my knife. I found no hide, and destroyed the picture in taking it off, but my work was not fruitless. In taking the picture off I found that it had at one time been folded, as if in sending by post, and like a flash came the thought, “The old woman must have friends in Dundee.”

From this thought to the next was an easy step.

“Could the three men have gone to Dundee?” Thieves who are wanted do not like to go to a strange town where they know no one; they prefer a place where a friend is waiting ready to give them shelter till the hue and cry is over. I determined to go down to the Railway Station at once.

There I found that only one man who was suspected as one of my “bairns” had appeared at the ticket window, but then he had asked and obtained three third-class tickets for Dundee.

The ticket clerk had an idea that, while this man got the tickets, another had stood just outside the rail, having under his arm a faded green carpet-bag, but of that he could not be certain, nor could he give me any definite description of their features or dress. I telegraphed at once to Dundee to have the three waited for on the arrival of the train, but they must have got out at some station outside of the town, for they were not in the train when it arrived. I reached Dundee in the afternoon, and with the help of a clever man, on the night staff there, and well acquainted with all the “howfs,” I started for a hunt through the town. I got him to take me to all the likely places, giving the preference to those occupied by Edinburgh folks who had taken up their abode in Dundee, but we were quite unsuccessful, and were coming through a close leading from the Overgate into the Nethergate, thoroughly tired out, when my eye fell on a *white* cam'-staned door step. In Dundee, I may explain, the housewives use a kind of dirty blue pipeclay to their door-steps, peculiarly offensive to the eyes of us Edinburgh folks, who are always accustomed to the pure white, and the sight of this one done with white was quite refreshing to my eyes.

“Stop,” I said to my guide. “Here is surely an Edinburgh tenant? Who lives in here?”

“Oh, they’re pretty square,” was the answer. “The man

works, and the woman keeps lodgers'; but, yes—they come from Edinburgh."

"Lodgers? that'll do—let's go in," I answered, and in we went. The place was a kitchen and a room, and it was the former we entered first, the room being at the back. Three men were having tea at the fireside, and the only one facing the door no sooner saw my face than he half started from his seat with a suppressed "Good God!" Of course he sat down again, biting his lip, and trying to go on with his tea, while his companions sedulously followed his example, but the mischief was done; and while I made my guide stand with his back on the closed door, I slowly went over the three silent men, examining them from head to foot, making them stand up for the purpose, and all without once saying what had brought me there. One had on trousers of grey tweed, and one of the legs of these near the bottom had been torn up and afterwards roughly sewed together with a thread of grey worsted. I took a piece of the same colour from my purse, and found that they matched exactly.

"That'll do for you," I said, as he resumed his seat, with a terror-stricken aspect, and a thud which suggested that he had dropped into it rather than sat down. "Now, you," I said to another, who had limped slightly in being turned round, "let's see your leg—not that one—the right—the right, you fool!"

He did not seem able to exert himself much, so I turned up the trouser leg and pulled down his stocking for him, when I found the calf tied round with a dirty linen rag which smelt strongly of whisky. Under this the flesh was black and discoloured, as with a powerful bite or compression, and I smiled out as I told him to tie it up again.

"One would think from the whisky you have put on it that you took M'Sweeny for a mad dog," I remarked, when he winced in a sickly manner and sat down. "That'll do for you. Now you," I said to the third, who was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, "get your coat on, for I mean to take the whole batch of you with me."

He went sheepishly towards the back room to obey, and I thought best to go with him to prevent mistakes. His coat lay on a chair covering something bulky, and when he lifted it I saw that the bulky article was a faded green carpet-bag wanting the handles, and sewed together at the mouth with three ply of the same fatal grey worsted.

I deftly opened the bag with a slash of my knife while he put

on his coat, and there I found nearly all the antique articles of bronze and silver which had been taken from Ashgrove House. Of course all three strenuously denied all knowledge and ownership of the bag or its contents, but the landlady settled the matter by promptly declaring it to be theirs, and nobody's but theirs.

I took them back to Edinburgh with me next day, and by the time their trial came on they had thought better of it, and pleaded guilty to the charge of robbery, and were sentenced severally to seven and ten years' penal. M'Sweeny, who was off duty for some weeks through the attack, growled a deal at the charge of waylaying being departed from, and still more when I consoled him by saying—

"It's not lost what a friend gets, Barney, and nobody can deny that you took the most *pains* in the case." And to this day M'Sweeny is sensitive to any mention of the word "knobstick."

THE MISSING TOOLS.

ONE afternoon in summer I found a man waiting for me at the Central Office, where he had impatiently sat out two hours—his dinner hour and another at the back of it—expecting me to appear.

"I want to know if you have discovered any of the stolen tools taken from the cabinet workshop of Wilson & Sons," he abruptly began, the moment I stood before him. "I'm James Brockie, one of the men, and the principal sufferer, so I've an interest in knowing."

"No; I'm sorry to say that we have neither heard of them nor traced the thief," I gravely replied, remembering the report of the mysterious robbery by the foreman of the establishment; "indeed, seeing that the thief was supposed to be a drunken tramp who was employed for a short time in your workshop, it is not likely that we will hear of him or the tools for some time."

"It was supposed to be him," said Brockie, with bitter emphasis, "but the suspicion was unjust."

"How do you know that? Have you a clue to the real thief?" I inquired, with fresh interest.

"I think I have; but whether I'm right or wrong, it wasn't the tramp who took the tools, though Archie Hooker, I remember, was the first to suggest that it might have been him," pursued Brockie, with the same ill-subdued excitement. "The fact is the tools have been vanishing regularly ever since the tramp disappeared. I've stood it a long time and watched my shopmates like a lynx, but I can make nothing out against any of them; so, as a cabinetmaker's tools aren't got for nothing, I resolved to come here and see you on my own responsibility."

"You've lost some lately then?" I said, pretty sure that more was coming.

"Lost some? Ay, new ones that had never touched a plank—that cost me nigh ten pounds only a week ago," he hotly returned. "Curse the thief, whoever he is—he knows

what tools are—for he always takes the scarcest and dearest. He's quite above touching an ordinary jack plane or hand-saw."

"Are you beginning to suspect one of the men now in the place?" I asked, after an awkward pause.

"I am; and that's the truth, though it would be a libel, I suppose, to say it to any but the police," said Brockie. "There's a man at the bench next to me; goodness knows he doesn't need to steal the tools out of poverty, for he's quite as good a worker as me; and it's him I suspect. His name is Archie Hooker."

"What object could he have in taking your tools?"

"Jealousy, I suppose. He gets all the best work though I'm as good as he, and wants to keep me back, just when he sees I'm getting my tool chest well filled. And he wouldn't lend me a tool, not though I was dying for it."

"But really I understood that more than one or two had lost tools," I said, in demur to the vague charge, and to the still more shadowy evidence supporting it.

"Yes; but that may be all through his cunning," returned Brockie; "he may take some of theirs just to divert suspicion, and make me not too ready in charging him."

"But how could he take them without your knowledge?"

"That's the mystery—that's what you must find out," frankly rejoined Brockie. "I consider myself a sharp man, and cunning as need be, yet it beats me to find out how it's done. I tell you he's as deep as the grave, for I've put tools out within reach of his hands, tools that could have gone into his waistcoat pocket, and then left the shop for a minute or two, just to see if he'd finger them, but he was too deep for me, and never touched them. No; they're taken in a way that seems magical—spirited away, as it seems."

"About what time do they generally disappear?"

"Oh, at all times. Sometimes in the day time, and sometimes between night and morning. For a time after the last complaint they did not vanish, but it's begun again, and with a vengeance."

"Is it possible that they can be taken when the men are absent; at meal hours, for instance?"

"Yes, but the place is locked up then; there's a man there for the purpose—a harmless old soul, who is naturally much put about at the report, as he is as likely to be suspected as any one. But, of course, Hooker might have a false key to the place; indeed, I remember once when old Simpson was

out of the way when the hour was up, and we couldn't get in, Hooker tried the door with a key of his own—he said it was his house key—and let us in easily enough.”

“Then you suspect that he gets in thus while the shop is empty?”

“I blame no one,” guardedly returned Brockie. “I don't want to get into trouble myself, or to land any one else into it unjustly. But I should say you are not far wrong. The things can't go without hands.”

“Are you quite sure you have told me all you know? Are you not keeping back something?” I asked after a pause. “If your tools are to be recovered we must know all.”

“There is only one thing, though I must say it was the first that made me suspect Hooker,” answered my visitor, rather reluctantly. “One day I had been using an American spokeshave, a patent thing, the body of which is of iron instead of wood, like our English-made ones. It was the only tool of the kind in the whole shop. Well, I left it on my bench at night, but in the morning when I got in it was gone. I don't know what made me think of it, but I went straight to Hooker's bag, which hangs above his bench, and hadn't turned over a dozen of the tools when I found my American spokeshave.”

“Might he not have been simply using it?”

“Wait till you hear,” excitedly pursued Brockie; “I thought he might say just what you have suggested, and after a moment decided to let the tool remain where I had found it. He came in a moment or two after and began work as cool as you like, and then I said out loud that I couldn't find my spokeshave. He took no notice, so I asked him point blank if he had seen it, or been using it. He said, “No,” as angry as possible, when I got as angry, and went to the bag and pulled it out before his eyes!”

“And what did he say then?”

“Say? The infernal rascal had the coolness to say that I had put it there myself, just to get him into trouble and turned out of the shop. Pretended to get red with fury, too, and called me all sorts of hard names, swearing like a trooper all the time.”

“Has he himself lost no tools?”

“He says he has, but we've only his word for that,” said Brockie, with some acuteness. “Every one has lost some; but if the thief is in the shop, he could easily take some of his own with the rest.”

I sat pondering for a minute, and then said—

“Perhaps you could leave out some good tools in a tempting position to-night, and I will have the place watched in some way by my chum M’Sweeny. I would do it in person, but unfortunately I have to go through to Glasgow to-night, at eight o’clock.”

To this proposal Brockie agreed with the greatest alacrity; and then, after thanking me warmly, and expressing a conviction that the mystery would be speedily solved, now that we had resolved on a practical attempt on the spot, he took leave. I was really glad of the information he had tendered, and in hope that we were now on the track of the criminal, and ventured to express an opinion to that effect to M’Sweeny, while giving him directions how to proceed so as best to keep the watching of the workshops a secret from all but the principals of the firm. What was my surprise, then, when, a little after six o’clock the same evening, while getting some directions at the Central Office before leaving for Glasgow, a man excitedly called, asking to see a detective, “and M’Govan, in particular, if he was in the place.”

I had not above an hour to spare, so I was a little impatient at the request; but the feeling vanished, and was replaced by unbounded astonishment when he began to speak.

“My name is Archibald Hooker, and I am a cabinetmaker by trade, employed at Wilson & Sons’ place,” he hotly observed. “I’ve been robbed of some of my best tools, and what’s more, I think I know the ——— rogue who has done it. Every one in the place has lost tools, and even the rascally thief who’s taken mine pretends to have been robbed; indeed, I think you were told about the thefts some time ago.”

“We were; but who is the rascally thief, as you are pleased to call him, who has done it?” I eagerly inquired.

“A jealous, mean-spirited hunk, called Jamie Brockie,” he wrathfully answered, so furious and excited as to take no notice of my start and quickly upraised eyebrows.

“Brockie? Brockie?” I faintly returned. “There is surely something very singular in this affair. Brockie? and why do you suspect him to be the thief?”

“He’s a cabinetmaker working at the bench next to mine, and the villain’s jealous because I get the best work. I’ve said very little about losing my tools, because I’ve had my eye on him for months, hoping to catch him at it, and often searching his tool chest for my own things when he was out of the shop.”

"And did you get any of them?"

"No, I didn't. He was too fly for that; and do you know what the sly schemer had the audacity to do?"

"No," I said, though I had a guess of what was coming.

"He went and put an American spokeshave of his into my bag, then waited till a few shopmates were about and charged me with stealing it, after asking me, as a blind, if I hadn't seen it or been using it. I gave it him hot then, though I tried hard to keep my temper, so as not to put him on his guard, and to-night I put out some tools, nearly new, and of course marked with my name and number and private mark. They'll be gone when I go in in the morning—I'm certain they'll be gone—and then you must go to Mr Brockie's house and search for them. If you don't find that he's the thief, I'll eat my hat."

I remained gravely silent for some moments, looking the man curiously in the face, and more puzzled than I would have cared to admit or explain. Evidently both passionate and quick-tempered, he mistook my silence for apathy or reluctance, and hotly added—

"You look as if you didn't care for the job. Do you think that because he isn't a thief by profession, and doesn't need to be, that he can't steal?"

"Not at all, only it would hardly do to follow your plan and search his house. Before that could be done we must get a warrant, and the warrant would scarcely be issued without better evidence than that which you have just advanced."

"I knew it! I knew it!" furiously responded Hooker. "You won't have anything to do with it; decline to interfere, and so on. I don't know what detectives are paid for—a parcel of blockheads!—idiots!—fools! Very well! very well! I've told you where to look for the thief, and how to catch him tripping. I can do no more with you, but I can at least protect myself. I thought of another plan before, but didn't like to do it without seeing if you would help me. Now I wash my hands of the whole affair. I'll trust in lazy policemen or detectives no longer. They're best off who can help themselves. Good night;" and he turned away and ran down the stairs.

"Stop! and listen to reason," I began, as he rapidly disappeared; but he did not stop, and was evidently beyond listening to anything I could say, so the sentence was never finished. When he was fairly gone, I sat for a minute or two trying to decide whether his bluster and fury were real or

affected to cover his guilt, and reluctantly I was forced to believe them real. If my supposition was correct, who then was the thief? It could not be the passionate Hooker, and still less, I thought, could it be the excited Brockie. After much thinking, I was inclined to believe the whole to be the work of some practical joker, who had guessed at the enmity of the two men, and wished to intensify it by having a little fun at their expense.

The supposition was far wide of the truth, as I shall show, but it caused me to take no new action, but simply to allow M'Sweeny to get into the building as had now been arranged, and report results in the morning.

But Hooker's threat as he passionately left the Office had been no idle one. He had remembered that he had in his possession a common door key which opened one of the doors into the cabinet shop, and at first seriously thought of getting into the building in secret, and watching it through the whole night. He changed his plan, however, and it was fortunate for himself that he did so; though I will not say it was as fortunate for his substitute or for my chum, M'Sweeny. It happened that a relation of Hooker's, who was connected with the Glasgow detective staff, was in Edinburgh on a visit at the time; and with the idea of lending as official an air as possible to his proceedings, Hooker went straight to this friend and asked him as a favour to go and watch the place, and, if possible, arrest the thief, a task which the other accepted with the greatest readiness. Of course this man, whom I shall call Sharpe, had no idea that another was appointed to watch the place, nor had M'Sweeny any expectation of meeting any of his western friends at such a time and place. At about nine o'clock, M'Sweeny got into a yard at the back of the cabinet workshops, in company with one of the sons of the proprietor, and with the aid of a ladder got into the workshop on the second flat, which he was most interested in watching, seeing that it was that in which both Brockie and Hooker worked by day.

My chum was forced to this mode of obtaining ingress by the fact that there was only one set of keys to the building and yard, and these were kept by old Simpson, the gatekeeper and watchman of the place, who was considered half-cracked, and not the best hand at keeping a secret. The hour of nine, indeed, had been chosen purposely, as at that time old Simpson was known to be absent at a revival meeting, and M'Sweeny

wished to be snugly hidden before he returned at ten o'clock to make his rounds, and see that all was safe and secure before retiring to rest. About half-an-hour later, and when M'Sweeny was snugly buried in a heap of shavings, close to the bench at which Brockie worked, the Glasgow detective had let himself in by the side door, with the key supplied by Hooker, and so noiselessly that his presence in the building was not once suspected by M'Sweeny, though but a single flight of wooden steps lay between their hiding-places.

A little after ten o'clock, a noise in the yard attracted M'Sweeny to the window of the workshop in which he lay hidden, and looking down he saw old Simpson—who was lame and ugly, as well as imbecile—slowly limping about on his last tour of inspection. He did not occupy above ten minutes with the task, and did not come near M'Sweeny's hiding-place; but as he had to cross the yard in that direction as he was leaving for his own little house outside, M'Sweeny hurriedly left the window for his former hiding-place, with his usual cleverness knocking over a long plank of wood with a loud bang, and so grazing his own shin-bone that he was squirming in agony, and groaning forth curses in Irish Gaelic every inch of the way to his bunch of shavings. And now came a marvellous circumstance, which instantly banished all thought from M'Sweeny's mind, and in its place left a thrilling and exultant delight. Scarcely had he concealed himself when there was a cautious and almost ghostly footfall on the wooden stair leading up to the workshop. It could not be old Simpson, he emphatically reasoned, for Simpson moved with a limp, and moreover he had heard the old watchman leave the place and lock the door after him. The cautious and guilty-like tread could mean but one thing—it was the mysterious thief!

There was a little moonlight, but not enough to make everything clear; and M'Sweeny, as the footsteps paused at the landing, and the door was noiselessly pressed inwards, could see only the dim outline of a man, whose white face was turned eagerly towards himself and the plank of wood he had knocked down. After an eager and scared-like look around, the stealthy figure advanced softly over the shaving-strewn floor, and listened breathlessly. M'Sweeny in turn held his own breath, but at the same moment felt for his staff, as he now saw that the intruder carried in his hand a billet of wood as heavy as an Indian club.

"He's a desperate character, I can see, and I'd give half-a-

crown this minute to have Jamie beside me to assist in mastering him," he thought. "Never mind; I'll have the more credit, and perhaps get a grant off the secret service money for risking me life. So here goes for a desperate struggle."

The intruder paused in the centre of the workshop, and after a vain look on every side, said in a whisper, which, though low, revealed unmistakably the Glasgow accent—

"I'm sure I heard somebody gaun across the floor, and a plank like that could hardly fa' itsel'," and turning his back upon M'Sweeny's hiding-place, the man fumbled under his coat for a dark lantern.

"Sure, we might have known it was a Glasgow thafe," thought M'Sweeny, in self-reproach. "All the puzzling cases come from them. Begorra, they ought to keep them to themselves; we'd be a lot easier, and it'd be something to sharpen their wits on."

A flash of light streamed forth from the opened slide of the dark lantern and went slowly and steadily round the workshop, under the benches, and into every corner likely to conceal a man.

"Faith, the villain's hauling out what's best to take away wid him," thought M'Sweeny, with a chuckle, as the light passed him. "Now he's at the wrong end of the place, and I'm betwixt him an' the door—now's my time!"

Slipping out of the heap of shavings, and taking a liberal covering of them with him on his coat, head, and fiery whiskers, M'Sweeny suddenly flung his great arms about the intruder, shouting out—

"Now, ye murderin' Glasgow keelie! drop the lantern and give in, or, begorra, it'll be worse for ye!"

The man sprang round with a shout, and did drop the lantern, which fell to the floor and fortunately was instantly extinguished, but, far from tamely submitting, he only throttled M'Sweeny with all the skill of an experienced garroter, crying in turn—

"I thought I heard somebody in the place, and I've got ye at last! I dinna want to hurt ye, but if ye force me till't, of course I'm no responsible——"

A thundering thwack over the skull with M'Sweeny's baton stopped his mild and merciful reasoning, and made him release the neck of his prisoner and drop to the ground to grope about for his heavy billet of wood; and in an instant, without rising, he had brought this with all his strength across M'Sweeny's

legs, effectually bringing Ireland to the ground and making the Scotch thistle once more raise its head in triumph. A vigorous exchange of yells, blows, and squirmings over the floor followed these clever feats, and on the whole the heavy billet of the Glasgow man had the best of it. M'Sweeney so felt its weight on his back, and sides, and lower extremities, that at last he cast aside his own baton and closed with his assailant, intent only upon depriving him of the terrific weapon. What puzzled him most was that the man had made no attempt to escape—an opportunity for which, I suspect, M'Sweeney had more than once given him while groaning on the floor or gingerly feeling his bruises; and perhaps a faint wonder of the same kind at length crossed the mind of the Glasgow man, for, during a pause to breathe, and while they were locked in each other's arms and hair, he hissed out—

"Noo, ye Irish thief, as ye neither seem inclined to rin awa' nor bide in peace, let me tell ye I'll no be responsible for your life. I'll land ye in the Office, though I should hae to kill you in the attempt. A dead thief is just as gude to us as a living ane—a lot better, indeed; for he's past mischief, and needs nae meat."

"That's just where I mean to land you," panted M'Sweeney, dexterously tugging back Sharpe by the hair, and nearly dislocating his neck as he did so. "M'Sweeney, the great detective, has a reputation to keep up; and I'd die rather than let ye off!"

A shout of dismay, and the sudden unclasping of the man's desperate grip, followed the speech; and M'Sweeney flattered himself that the magic of his name had been enough to bring one of the most desperate and daring of robbers in abject submission to the ground. But an imprecation and groan of disappointment from the prostrate man damped the rising elation, and made him tremble with a fear that he had again distinguished himself only in pugnacious stupidity.

"You M'Sweeney, and, like a fool, never let on!" reproachfully groaned the other. "I'm a detective, too—Sharpe, from Glasgow—and was set to watch the place by my cousin, Archie Hooker, who has had a lot of his tools stolen."

"The devil you was!" blankly answered M'Sweeney, feeling the pain of his bumps and bruises for the first time in all their appalling strength. "And I was set to watch Brockie's tools—them all, in fact; and instead of the thief we've only been beatin' each other. Ochone, how ever will I look Jamie in the

face wid my head all done in plasters, and no thafe to show for it! Faith, I've a good mind to take you wid me, and call ye a thafe, just to save my reputation!"

"I was thinking o' takin' you," groaned the other, showing his little staff of authority, while M'Sweeny did the same. "Weel, I've got enough o' this wark; I'll awa' hame for some whisky, and bandages, and sticking-plaster."

"We'll go together," sighed M'Sweeny, shaking the other by the hand with melancholy interest. "I've only had ten minutes of it, but sure I've got enough to last me a dacent lifetime. Come along, Sharpe; the less we say about this affair the better for both of us."

Thus they consoled each other, and then got out of the building as quietly as possible, and led each other off through the deserted streets, leaving the cabinet workshops to take care of themselves. M'Sweeny had fully resolved to say as little as possible about the adventure to me, but the moment I sighted his battered face and bandaged arm, I exclaimed—

"What! have you been pitching into the wrong man as usual?" To which he dolefully replied—

"No, Jamie, ye're wrong, as I'm sorry to say; 'twas the wrong man that was pitching into me. He did it well, too, though he's laid up wid his exertions and my own. But, sure, that would be a trifle, only this morning one of the men's been up again as mad as ever."

"What! has the thief been at it again?" I exclaimed, in chagrin and surprise.

"Faith has he, and tuck a good haul too," feebly returned M'Sweeny. "It must have been done after we left, and before six in the morning. We'll have to try something together; we always work best together."

"Ugh, you blockhead!"

"I wish I had been, for then I shouldn't have felt the wallowing," dolefully returned my chum; and thus I left him to see after the case myself.

I found that matters stood exactly as M'Sweeny had described them, another batch of tools being gone, and no thief visible or traceable high or low. I had a deal to listen to, and received innumerable suggestions from the men and old Simpson, and even from the principals of the firm, but merely heard them, and made no comment in return. I had resolved to manage things in my own way, and let no one know what my plan was. I could have got the use of Hooker's key to

admit myself, but even him I resolved to keep in ignorance, the more so as I had noticed in the next yard the identical ladder by which M'Sweeny had been admitted the night before. I got out to the place about eight o'clock, and watched from a safe place till old Simpson had gone to his revival meeting, when I got into the building by using the ladder; and after a search through every part, to make sure of no one being secreted in the place but myself, I arranged a hiding-place behind some planks, and settled myself to watch.

A little after ten, old Simpson got back from his preaching and praying, and after a very diligent search through the different places, he retired to his devotions. He had no more music in him than an old tin pan, yet I heard him singing away at a psalm with his harsh and horrible voice for nearly twenty minutes, composing the tune as he went along. The night was warm, and he had his window, which looked into the yard, open; and after the psalm he settled himself to read aloud a chapter of the Old Testament, in a voice as rasping and monotonous as his singing had been horrible. Shortly after this he shut the window, put out his light, and went to bed. Whether he really slept I do not know, but in less than three hours I was roused by his limping step on the stairs, and the fact that he was *descending* the stairs seemed to indicate that I at least had been asleep. I slipped down with my boots off, and plainly saw him bearing towards his own window, on the other side of the yard, a coarse bag such as carpenters keep nails in, filled with sundry articles, which he took out one by one and placed on a table inside the window. He then returned to the workshop, where I got back to my hiding-place, and plainly saw him pick up several tools from the different benches, till, after going round the place, his bag was again filled. This he did so often that my curiosity was powerfully excited.

"He is surely taking an unusually large number," was my mental remark. "He can never expect them to pass over such a wholesale swoop in silence."

But on his last visit a few muttered words of the old villain first puzzled me, and then, when I realised their true meaning, petrified me with a sudden thrilling alarm.

"It'll be in the papers," were his muttered words, given with a chuckle hideous to behold, "and it'll say, 'several of the workmen have lost valuable chests of tools.' Hi, hi, hi! it'll be funny to read it—very funny."

While I had been meditating on the words thus imperfectly

heard and dimly understood, he had vanished into his house, closed the window, and seemingly retired for the night. But scarcely five minutes had gone, when a peculiar vapour, rising about my hiding-place, and dimming the conflicting light of the approaching day and the waning moon, caused me to start forth with a sudden blaze of enlightenment.

"The place below is on fire! the infernal old rogue has first stripped the benches, and then fired the place to hide the robbery," I cried; and then with a swift rush I made for the wooden stair, only to be driven back by a dense cloud of smoke rising from the workshop below. I tried that way no longer, but rushing to the window, got down bootless as I stood by the ladder to the next yard, in which I had two men in waiting, who instantly gave the alarm. A number of early workers passing at the time gave ready assistance; the gate of the place was burst in, and by terrible exertion the fire was extinguished before it could spread farther than the shop in which it originated. One of the most diligent workers apparently—but who did more harm than good—was old Simpson; but when the confusion was over, I rather startled him by saying—

"I have been much interested in listening to you at your devotions, and should like much to see the interior of your little house."

He gave me a curious and uncertain look, but led the way to his place, in which I was soon attracted by a large trunk near the window, which could scarcely be moved by one man, and which he hurriedly excused himself from opening on the ground that he had lost the key. I soon found the key for him, by simply requesting him to turn out his pockets; and when this was accomplished, I showed the astonished workmen, including Brookie and Hooker, who had arrived, that the chest was full of stolen tools, many of them of considerable value. Old Simpson then made a rambling statement about having a revelation from the Lord that the place was to go on fire, and that he had got up and put the tools there for safety; but the discovery of a letter from a Glasgow reset who had bought from him a previous lot, rather altered the complexion of his story. For robbery and fire-raising he afterwards was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude; yet his revival freak followed him to prison, and I believe that he there displayed great anxiety for the conversion of some of his fellow-prisoners. What a pity that we could not import a few more of his kind into the same establishment!

AN OLD SCORE.

OUTSIDE the big door of the Calton Jail, any morning but Sunday, there may be seen a queer group of loiterers. They begin to gather about ten o'clock—sometimes an hour earlier—and there they wait, or loaf, or slink about till about half-past ten, when the door opens to set free their friends or acquaintances whose terms expire at that hour. Many a time I have watched that scene from a safe point among the trees on the opposite slope, getting valuable hints as to who was the boon companion of some of my “bairns,” and therefore likeliest to be involved with him in his next crime.

The most casual observer could here distinguish the confirmed criminal and jail-bird from the shrinking and shame-faced amateur or beginner, creeping out after his first sentence. The incorrigible comes out smiling and cool, and greets his companions as affably as if he had just returned from a tour through the Lakes; the amateur looks as if he would rather endure a second sentence than run the gauntlet of those curious eyes. Of course there are others there who can scarcely be classed as criminals—wives waiting tenderly for the husbands who have battered their heads and blackened their eyes, and children waiting for their dreadful mothers—but in these I have a less direct interest.

It was while watching for a certain purpose this strange gathering that I first noticed particularly the boy whose case I am now giving. I had taken him when he was “wanted,” but the case was such a commonplace affair that I paid little attention to the young criminal, and do not now remember what was his sentence—probably thirty days. Willie White was just fourteen, and did not look like a thief—having a frank, open look in his face—but a thief he certainly was. He had stolen both money and goods from his employer. The merchant had consulted us—had been told to mark some money, and the boy was neatly trapped with the marked coins in his pocket. It was a bad case, inasmuch as the boy had been greatly

trusted, and was so strongly believed in by his parents that they indignantly denounced the arrest as a cruel plot, till the trial came, and their eyes were opened.

When the sentence was passed, the father—a feeble, consumptive-looking man—rose from among the spectators, and, addressing the boy as he was being led from the bar, said—

“Aunce a thief, aye a thief. Never speak to me or look near me as long as ye live! I’m no your faither now—mind that—I’m no your faither.”

“But I’m aye your mother, Willie!” cried a weeping woman at his side. “It was that scoundrel Stark that put it a’ in the laddie’s heid.”

That was all that passed as the boy was led out; but the whole scene came back to my memory when the jail door opened and the boy stepped timidly forth into the sunshine. There he was, a branded felon, cast off by every one, and now thrown on the world to sink or swim as fate ordained.

Just as I recognised him and recalled the scene at the Police Court, I saw Bob Stark step forward and lay a hand on the boy’s arm. Stark was then a lad of eighteen or nineteen—a thief undoubtedly, but so cunning in all his operations that few convictions were ever scored against him. I had no doubt then that Stark, as the poor mother said, had a finger in the pie; that familiar touch on the arm told the whole story. And it did more, for it pointed to the future, and told of the certain fate of the as yet almost unstained young life. It was almost a pity to let it go unchecked, and I was in the act of crossing the road to interpose a sharp warning, when a shabbily dressed woman, whom I recognised as the mother, elbowed her way to the boy’s side and laid a hand on the opposite arm to that enclasped by the trainer of thieves. I paused then, and watched the scene which followed with deepest interest.

The thief was evidently angry at the interruption, for his voice rose to an angry snarl; the boy was evidently swayed powerfully, for he paused and held back from the tugging grasp of Stark.

“You won’t give him a lodging, or take him home?” cried the trainer of thieves. “Then what the —— do you want with him? I’m willing to give him a crib, and help him all I can. Surely he knows which is best?”

“You should have been in jail instead o’ him,” cried the mother, bitterly.

"All a mistake," said Stark, with a course laugh. "Would you like him to sleep in the street at night, eh?"

"Yes, in his grave, rather than he should gang wi' you," cried the excited mother, tightening her grasp upon the arm of the boy. "Speak oot, Willie—wasn't it that villain that egged ye on to a' that ye did?"

There was no reply from the boy, but his flushed cheek and downcast eye were a sufficient answer.

"Come along, Willie; never mind her; they've cut you for good; so what's the use of listening to her?" and with this rough speech Stark dragged the boy away by sheer force, while, at the same moment, some of his acquaintances surrounded and began to jostle and abuse the poor mother. In a moment more I was through them, and had Stark wrenched round by the collar. The moment his eye fell on my face he let go the boy's arm and tried to smile pleasantly.

"What's up now, Jamie? Gently! gently! don't tear my collar if ye can help."

"Look you, Stark," I said with some excitement, "I've had my eye on you for a good while now, and when I do take you it won't be for a trifling thirty or sixty days you'll go in. What do you want with this boy?"

"To mak' him a thief like himsel', Maister M'Govan," cried the poor mother, who had got rid of her tormentors as if by magic. "Oh, what for can ye no pit *him* in jail, where he'll no get at young laddies, to corrupt them and mak' them waur than himsel'?"

"It's a free country, I s'pose," sullenly answered Stark. "The lad can go where he likes. I am not forcing him, am I?"

"And you boy—do you want to go with him and become a jail bird and an outcast for life?" I sharply pursued, addressing the boy.

"No, I don't," he answered with much resolution, and drawing himself up with the first firmness he had shown since quitting the prison.

"Then, you walk!" I cried to Stark—"walk! this moment, or I'll take you now."

He needed no second command, but dived off in the direction of Low Calton, with a cringe and a forced smile.

"Are you going to take him home with you?" I asked, as soon as the villain was gone.

"I daurna," said the poor mother, with fresh tears. "His

faither is awfu' strict, and winna hae him in the hoose again. He doesna ken I'm here or he wad never forgie me. Oh Willie! I think I'll break my heart!"

Such a passionate fit of weeping followed this wail that at last the boy said, with a quivering lip—

"Ye needna greet sae sair, mother; I'll never gang wrang again."

"Ye'll promise that before Mr M'Govan?" eagerly exclaimed the mother, almost brightening through her tears. "Though he's a thief-catcher, he wishes ye naething but gude."

"I'll promise it, and keep it," said the boy with quiet determination; and the mother took him in her arms, and there and then kissed him repeatedly.

Then as his forlorn and homeless condition rose before her the tears returned, and she said—

"But what will ye dae, my bairn, what will ye dae? I'll no be allooed even to speak to ye."

"I'll gang away where I'm no kent—far away," said Willie, with a quivering lip.

"And ye winna break yer promise?"

"I'll dee first!" he said; and I began to see that there was more manly stuff in him than I had imagined.

During the whole interview he had not once let fall a word blaming Stark or implicating him in his fall—perhaps it was a boyish promise or mistaken idea of honour that sealed his lips—but that the subject was not absent from his mind will appear before I have done with his case.

On getting his emphatic promise, the mother brought out a little bundle from under her shawl, containing his Sunday jacket, an extra shirt, and a pair of stockings, all of which she had managed to smuggle out of the house without his father's knowledge.

"I'll maybe never see you again, Willie," she said, not attempting to stem the flow of tears. "Your faither is sair against ye, and unless he changes we may never meet mair; but ye'll aye mind that I did a' I could for ye."

"Yes, mother, I'll aye mind that," was the boy's husky answer as he took the little bundle.

Then the poor woman brought out a shabby little purse, and emptying its contents—only a few shillings—into her hand, she pressed them into his pocket, saying—

"Every penny o't is hard wrought for, Willie. I've had mony a sair stint to save it, wi' your sick faither to keep, and no that muckle wark to be had; so ye'll no waste it?"

The boy promised to obey, and in a short time they parted.

What could there be but tearful and bitter regrets at such a parting? When the poor mother asked him if he would ever write to her, or come and see her, the boy's mouth became pursed in, and he said—

“No while my faither's living.”

The house was evidently divided, and the boy keenly sensible that he alone was the cause of the division.

Willie had stated his intention of going to sea. He was a smart, well-built lad for his age, and had no doubt but some master would be glad to get him as an apprentice, and not ask too particularly after his parents and antecedents.

And sanguine as were his hopes, they might have been fulfilled to the letter, but for one circumstance. He wandered down to Leith, and actually did find the master of a sloop trading between Leith and St Petersburg, who wanted a smart lad, and appeared pleased with his answers and appearance—more especially with his frank admission that he had quarrelled with his father and left home for ever. But the man would not, or could not, give him a definite answer till the next day; and Willie was forced to be content, and spent the rest of the day in wandering through the harbour and along the shore, gazing at the rolling sea, and wondering if he should ever be spared to return from its boundless wastes. During one of these aimless strolls, he was startled to find his evil acquaintance, Bob Stark, loitering in his wake. He at once put on a spurt to get away from him, but Bob was not to be so easily shaken off. He easily gained the boy's side, and renewed importunities, promising him a comfortable home and nothing particular to do, if he would only be guided by him; and it was only after a hot argument, and a plain threat that if Stark did not leave him, he would hand him over to the police and reveal all, that he at last shook him off.

The month was August; and with a view to economy, Willie had resolved to pass the night in the streets, or at least in the open air. At a late hour, therefore, he was slowly wandering through one of the narrow streets, when a sudden blow on the temple landed him almost senseless on the pavement. At the same moment he was all but strangled from behind, and then as swiftly stripped of his bundle, jacket, and cap, and the few shillings he possessed, then treated to a few savage parting kicks and blows, and left bleeding on the ground.

No one witnessed the vicious assault and robbery, and

Willie got leave to recover at leisure, for not a soul looked near. When he was able to sit up and collect his thoughts, he was in a sorry plight. One of his eyes was already so swollen that he could not open it; his face was cut and bleeding, his body one aching mass, and his clothes gone, all but his waistcoat and trousers. Stupified as he was, however, with the brutal treatment, he had sense enough to reason out the whole affair, and attribute the robbery to the real source.

"Bob Stark has arranged it out of spite—very likely it was him that gripped me behind; and now I'm more vagabond-like than ever. Naebody would think of having onything to do wi' me now. Who would look at me wi' a black e'e?"

Willie should have reported the robbery to the police, but he did not. He could not bear to be brought out of the obscurity he courted, and show himself in his sad plight to many who would know him, and perhaps only despise him, and say he should keep better company.

"I'll mark it down as a score against Stark, and maybe pay him off some day," he resolved, in his slow quiet fashion. "He has done it, thinking I'd go to him in my strait and give in to all he wants, but he doesn't know me yet. I'm glad he's done this; it shows what he's fit for."

His only concern now was to get away as far as possible from the place where he was known, and might be at any moment recognised in his deplorable condition. He therefore gathered himself together and slowly crawled out of the town in a westerly direction. His thoughts were bitter enough, but on no one did he heap so much abuse as on himself. He had such a disreputable look, with his blackened eye, cut face, and shirt sleeves, that even the ordinary tramps and beggars on the road shunned him. How he progressed along the road, or whither he wandered, he could never afterwards tell, but he was found senseless and all but dead in a dry ditch at the roadside, near Grangemouth. A farm cart picked him up, and he was lodged in a barn among straw till the county police could be sent for, and he should be taken to the poorhouse. It was then decided that he was too ill to be removed, and for long days he saw nobody but a kindly farm hind, who brought him, morning and night, a jug of new milk as soon as she had milked the cows. He recovered sooner than they had expected; and it being harvest time, he begged to be allowed to stay and work in the fields a little to pay them back for their kindness. He was nearly six weeks working in the fields, at the end of

which time the farmer not only gave him a jacket, but a few shillings as well, and, what was far dearer to the outcast, a few words of hearty commendation and good wishes for his future.

At Grangemouth Willie, who still had the idea that the sea alone would wash away his prison stain, easily got employment on a coal sloop. The work was both sooty and severe, as he found that he had been taken on in place of an able-bodied man, but it proved a step to better things, for after a fearful winter, which he thought he would never live through, he was accepted as apprentice on board a Newcastle trader, and with this vessel he remained until he was an articled seaman. He then drifted all over the world almost, never forgetting the bitter lesson taught him by the Calton Jail, but in all his wanderings he never came near Edinburgh. Strange to say, it was the place which was oftenest in his thoughts, yet furthest from his intentions.

"If I could be sure *he* is dead I'd go at once," he often said to himself, thinking of his father's stern face as last seen in the Police Court. "Mother always stuck by me, but he never could forgive a fault. Dear me, he might think that I was only a boy then, and it was my very simplicity and innocence made me an easy victim."

When he had been away for nine years, the constantly recurring thought insensibly prompted him to a journey to "Auld Reekie."

"I don't need to go near them," was his consoling thought; "I can just have a look round me at the familiar streets and closes, and maybe hear something about them, and come away again."

When he came to stride through the city, a full-grown bearded man, he found the places as much changed as himself. Old streets were cut away, and great new blocks of glaring white stone occupied their place; the shops were occupied by new tenants; the very faces on the street seemed all new and strange. After Willie had realised the changed aspect with something like a sigh, he found himself, after circling and circling, insensibly drawing nearer to a certain court in Buccleuch Street.

"I might hear something about them, at least," was his thought, which somehow set his heart thumping against his side in a tremor, such as he had never felt in the most awful danger at sea. He passed through St Patrick Square and

Buccleuch Pend, and was moving along Buccleuch Street, when he chanced to notice an old man coming slowly in his direction, leaning on a stick and coughing painfully. The old man's hair was grey almost to whiteness, and he was evidently in bad health, and merely taking an airing on the sunny side of the street, at the warmest part of the day. It was not the face, nor the whitened hair, which were certainly strange to him, that attracted Willie's attention, so much as a flash of the old man's eye as they passed each other.

"Surely—surely that's my faither," said the young seaman, with a fast-beating heart, and eyes suddenly growing misty. "Maybe he saw me and doesn't want to speak to me."

Along the street a bit, Willie paused and looked back, and saw the old man pass into the old familiar court.

"I believe it's my faither," said Willie, with the word almost choking him.

A child stood at the mouth of the court, and the old man before passing in had patted it on the head, and spoken a word or two. In a moment or two more Willie stood beside the child, pointing in at the vanishing form of the old man.

"Who's that, my lassie?" he said, with forced calmness.

"Mr White," was the shy answer.

"Is he ill?"

"No, it's the mason's trouble," said the girl, evidently thinking *that* was nothing.

"Is that it?" vacantly echoed the sailor.

"That's it—and a broken heart," said the girl, getting ready her skipping-ropes.

"What's a broken heart?" huskily asked the sailor.

"I dinna ken; but that's it," said the girl, dogmatically.

"Doesn't—doesn't somebody live with him, to look after him, and all that?" hoarsely continued the inquirer.

"No," said the girl, in a careless tone, that stabbed him through; "naebody but Mrs White. She washes, ye ken."

"Oh, I see;" and in his intense relief Willie put a sixpence into the girl's hand for "sweeties." "Is she in now?"

"No, no, she's oot long ago working—she winna be back till long after I'm in bed."

Willie turned away, and left the spot with feelings which cannot be described, simply because he never afterwards could recall them. He began to sicken of Edinburgh and long for the broad sea, and rocking ship, and the dusky faces and broiling sun of far-off lands. His father had looked him full

in the face and passed him, so it was evident that he meant to keep up the feud, and maintain the estrangement to the end.

Willie forgot that he himself was as greatly changed in appearance as his father, and that a tall, bearded man of twenty-three is very different from a boy of fourteen. Possibly he would have left the city not many hours after the visit to Buccleuch Street, but again his destiny was to be influenced by the stumbling-block of his life. In passing up the High Street about dusk, he saw a brutalised-looking man lounging at the mouth of a close, whom he instantly recognised as Bob Stark. Years had made little change on him. His clean-shaven face was a little more bloated, his bull neck a little more apoplectic, and his gait a little more shambling, but otherwise he was pretty much the same scoundrel as when last Willie had seen him. The change on Willie, on the other hand, had not only been marked, but all for the better. He was nearly six feet high, and strong as a lion with buffeting wind and wave. More, he felt his power, and with the first glance at Bob Stark clenched his heavy hand and muttered—

“Well, I’d like to have just one blow at his head—straight between the eyes, as hard and heavy as I could drive it in. I’m just in the mood for it, but I s’pose they’d call it assault, and cry for the police and have me locked up.”

During the momentary pause of the smartly dressed sailor, the evil eye of Stark—who was now a tout of the very worst description—caught his own, and he made a step forward.

Then the seaman made some rambling inquiry about a public-house, and Stark instantly volunteered to be his friend and guide through all the dangers of Edinburgh, whose terrible gaping mouths were wide open to swallow helpless sailors like himself. This generous offer prompted the young seaman to his next action, which was to assume the role of a careless, happy-go-lucky seaman, who had already drunk a great deal more than he was freighted to carry.

“I hope he’ll get cross, so that I can have just one tap at his skull to pay off that old score,” was Willie’s thought; and full of this idea he tottered from public-house to public-house, treating Stark liberally, but being careful himself to swallow little or none of the drink he ordered. At length, when the sailor appeared in beautiful condition for business, and the thick gold chain hanging so carelessly at his waistcoat-pocket with the watch attached to it, and a well-lined purse as well, seemed to Stark already his own, the thieves’ tout proposed to

him to go "home." Whether it was the suggestive word or his long pent-up anger, Willie nearly betrayed himself by the alacrity with which he started up to obey. They staggered out of the public-house, Willie leaning heavily on the arm of his companion, and appearing so flabby and flexible about the knees as to call forth many a brilliant witticism from his delighted guide. They were passing thus down the High Street in great apparent glee and merriness, when a poorly clad woman hurrying past caught sight of the crime-stained features of Stark by the light of a street lamp, and paused in pity.

"Take care, my man—ye dinna ken the character you're wi'," she suddenly exclaimed to the sailor, heedless of the scowls and muttered oaths of Stark. "Dinna gang wi' that villain if ye value your life or your money."

Fearful of losing his prey, Stark, who had just signalled to a companion, broke out into an unmusical rendering of a popular song, and tried to hurry Willie into one of the dark closes a little above Hunter Square. Willie could scarcely bring himself to scout at such bravery and kindness as that of the poor woman, but his plan demanded it, and he merely turned with a drunken leer, and told her he was quite able to take care of himself, and that his companion was an old friend.

"Freend?" cried the poor woman, with sudden excitement. "I ken something aboot your freend. He robbit me o' my only laddie—my only bairn! I only wish there was a policeman here, and he would tell ye——"

While she continued speaking, Stark hurried him into the close, and then, noticing the horrible place for the first time, it struck Willie that it was possible to venture too far, and he hung back in demur.

"Why—mate—what infernal hole is this you're taking me into?" he said, trying to hold back.

"It's just the entrance—it's a nice place when you're in," said Stark excitedly. "Come along—come along!"

They were half-way down the close, and standing at the entrance to a deep dark stair, and Willie stood like a rock.

"Not a bit further," he said, with a firmness which instantly prompted Stark to action. Placing his bent finger in his mouth, he emitted a shrill whistle to his companion slowly following, and at the same moment made a quick snatch at the sailor's watch and chain. The signal was promptly answered by a rush of feet, and a quick clutching at Willie's throat by a garroting arm; but then there came a change; for lo! the

drunk man was drunk no longer, and lifted his right foot and sent back his iron-shod heel on the shin-bone of the garroter with a force that snapped it like a pipe-shank. As the garroter dropped with a howl of agony, Willie's clenched fist flew out at Stark's face with all the force of a nine years' well-nursed wrong. For a moment Stark's nose and eyes seemed to be mixed up in a terrific explosion, and then he was just conscious and no more of being lifted up by the throat off the slimy close, along with his broken-legged companion, and then felt a second explosion as the sailor brought their heads together like hollow-sounding cocoa-nuts, with all the force of his brawny arms. And not one explosion, but many followed, the sailor dragging both his prisoners up the close as he rattled their skulls together, heedless, in the excitement of the moment, of the shower of blows being rained on him by some evil-looking friends of his prisoners, who had swarmed from their dens at the frightful outcry. The busy assailants would actually have got the two miserable men free by sheer force, had it not been for the arrival of a couple of policemen, who had been warned farther down the street of what was likely to happen; and the moment these appeared the crowd vanished as by magic.

"I tellt ye what he was," said the poor woman who had brought the timely help, "but ye wadna believe me."

"I did believe you," said Willie, shaking her warmly by the hand; "but, you see, I had an old score to pay off, and I couldn't stop to put you right."

Both prisoners were now all but senseless, and one of them howled so horribly at every movement that he had to be carried to the Office. The woman being an important witness, went with them; and the gold chain, dangling in two pieces at Willie's breast, told only too plainly what the case was.

Stark's face was so much damaged and swollen that none in the Office recognised him; but, to the surprise of all, the sailor said—

"His name is Bob Stark. I knew him nine years ago, when he made me a thief, and I wanted to pay off the score; but I never thought he'd give me such a beautiful chance. I'm quite satisfied."

"And your name?" I said, without the slightest recollection of the case.

"Willie White."

A great scream interrupted the recording of the name, for the poor woman had pressed suddenly forward, and now stood gazing into the frank face and clear eyes of the sailor.

"Willie White! Willie White!" she excitedly cried. "The same name and the same time—and the face is like my laddie's, only manlier and bonnier——"

It was now the sailor's turn to start and grow pale, as he tremulously bent forward to scan the worn and pinched face of the shabbily clad woman.

"It's my mother!" he said at last, with a great heaving sob; and then she was swooped up bodily in his strong arms, and kissed and wept over to her heart's content, while we pretended to be busy with the books, and with messages to the medical inspector to come and inspect the prisoners' injuries. One of these injuries being a broken leg, had to be treated as such, but Stark's concussions on the brain and face required only time. A few weeks after, at the Justiciary Court, I had the most intense satisfaction in seeing him get the benefit of a scare against garroters which at that time existed in the town in a sentence of seven years, the first decent conviction we had ever scored against him. His companion got the same as soon as his leg had mended.

Willie got a royal and loving reception from his father, instead of the repulse he had looked for, and many declared that the old man took a fresh lease of health from that hour. They left Edinburgh together shortly after, and so I lost sight of them; but I have no doubt that Willie is still nobly working for them, and remembering that he owes the happiness to the paying off of an old score.

AN EXPENSIVE PRESCRIPTION.

MANY of my readers may remember a shabbily-dressed man, in snuff-brown coat and spectacles, who used to stroll in by Newington nearly every forenoon at the sunny part of the day. He was a seedy-looking customer, who snuffed a deal, and did not keep his face and hands over clean, and used to spend most of his time during this daily stroll in hanging about second-hand bookstalls and brokers' shops.

Theophilus Brownings was the brother of an Edinburgh merchant owning one of those large, old-fashioned houses in a side street off Newington. The old man was a great scholar, but as he had been a dreamer all his days, he had never developed to anything, and was now a kind of harmless pensioner in the house of his aforesaid. He had an allowance of £50 a-year from his brother; but as he spent every penny of it on books and curiosities, his clothes remained seedy and unchanged for years. I daresay Philip Brownings lost nothing by making this allowance to his eccentric brother, for the articles so picked up would probably be worth a great deal more when they were sold as a collection. However, that has little to do with the remarkable case in which the doited-looking old book-worm played the hero, and which I am about to recall.

Regularly as the holiday season came round, Philip Brownings and his family went off to the Highlands or seaside for a couple of months, taking the servants with them, and leaving the great place in charge of this old man. They would gladly have taken him with them, but he could never be persuaded to leave Edinburgh even for a single night. Edinburgh and its bookstalls and brokers' shops was his life—his world—and to deprive him of that would have been to destroy his happiness. This arrangement proved very satisfactory for many years, for the plate and valuables never needed removal to a bank, and, the house being never empty, was less liable to attract thieves.

It chanced, however, that in an evil moment, during one July, the house fell under the evil eye of one of my "bairns," named William Pike. Pike was not a trained or professional thief; he was only a brutalised and cowardly labourer, who was so eaten up with laziness and love of drink that he had taken to the life as the handiest at the moment. Whether this was his real name or not I never knew, but I remember well that it was never—even by his intimate associates—contracted to Will, or Willie—he always got William in full.

Pike noticed the house, and its size, and promising look; but as it was enclosed in a high wall he could not get quite near enough to decide upon the easiest way of getting inside. He discovered, however, that the family were absent, and that no one looked after the place but an old and stupid-looking man. If Pike had had a companion in crime, he would probably have arranged for a burglary in the usual way, but he worked alone, with such assistance as his wife might give, and disliked danger, hard work, or trouble of any kind, and so was thrown back on his native cunning for a better plan. The windows were all shuttered and secured, with the exception of one of the attics far beyond his reach, which was occupied by the old book-worm; and the doors were probably as safely guarded. All this meant hard work for the housebreaker, and tools of the handling of which William knew nothing; added to which was the fact that the old man was never out of the house at night, and the robbery could not safely be attempted by day.

"If it had been the dark nights now, and he was late of getting back, how easy it would be for me to rush on him just as he gets the garden-door open, knock in his head with a neddy, and then take the keys and go through the place comfortable?" reflected the benevolent William. "Nobody would notice anything in this quiet place, and it would all be inside the door; but it's no use thinking of it, for if it was winter the place wouldn't be empty."

William took to following the old man, and was often sorely tempted in doing so. It was the custom of Brownings, after locking the garden-gate, to keep the key on that door on his finger during the whole of his walk—that is, with the fore finger of the left hand thrust through the ring of the key, and the barrel lying in the palm of his closed hand.

"A good grab at it when he's looking at some o' them old books would do the trick," William often greedily reflected; but then the "good grab" was just what he lacked courage to

make, though he was in hope that the actual door of the house might be left either open or simply on the latch.

Had William been certain as to how or where the old man carried the actual keys of the house, he would have employed some of his distinguished acquaintances to pick his pocket; but though he watched the unconscious "plant" well and narrowly, he never could get at that knowledge.

"If I could get in tow with the old bloke and make him drunk, that would be the plan," he feverishly thought one forenoon, after following him over the half of the city; "but he hardly ever drinks, and might be suspicious. Wait! by gum! I think I have it; that would be the plan, and he'd jump at the bait like winking."

William's new inspiration did not take long to develop and arrange; and the next day he managed to get into conversation with Brownings at one of the bookstalls.

"I wouldn't give a shilling for the whole lot," he said, with a commendable contempt for fustiness and age, in allusion to the books on the stall; "in fact, sir, I've got a whole room down at my place choke full of old books, and swords, and nick-nacks, hundreds of years old, and as mouldy as old cheese, and I'd give the lot to anybody for five shillings, just to get rid of them."

"Old books, you say? hundreds of years old?" cried the old man with roused interest. "I should like to see them."

"Tuts, they're not worth looking at," said William, with great modesty. "The print is mostly the old-fashioned kind, and lots of them are in Latin, and other foreign languages."

"That's nothing to me—I can read them," said Brownings, with whetted interest. "Where is your place? couldn't we go there now?"

"It's away down in the Cowgate," said William, in apparent demur, "a good bit from here, but I don't think you'd give twopence for them all."

Brownings nevertheless declared that he would give more if they were what he expected, and said with truth that the Cowgate was only a "five minutes' walk" from where they stood, and that the whole visit would not occupy half-an-hour, a calculation regarding which William had an opinion of his own.

With affected reluctance the thief yielded, and led the way down to his den in the Cowgate—a little cellar of two places up one of the slimiest and darkest closes. Brownings hesitated for a moment at the close mouth, and said somewhat suspiciously—

"I thought it was a broker's shop you kept?"

"Get away with you! do you think I'd give you them so cheap if I was a broker?" said the generous William Pike; and so they proceeded up the close and down some steps into William's den, in which they were graciously received by Pike's wife, who hastened to dust a chair and bring out a bottle and glasses to entertain the gentleman visitor.

Brownings hastily demurred, saying he had come to look at the books, and not to drink; but this statement was received by such a warm protest, that he at length allowed the big woman to set down two delf cups by way of glasses—into one of which she had previously dropped fifty drops of laudanum—and then, with much ostentation, to pour into each a good glassful of whisky.

The cups were handed to her husband and the visitor by this fair enchantress of twenty stone—she taking care that the drugged cup went to the gentleman with the door-key so temptingly dangling at his finger.

Brownings, in haste to get the thing over, hastily gulped down the liquor without noticing the taste particularly, and then asked to see the books and antiquities. But it did not suit William to comply very hastily with the demand, from the simple fact that he had none to show. He therefore professed to be dying for a smoke, and apologised for gratifying the wish before hastening to drag out the "old rubbish" from the cellar at the back—a place built against the slope of the hill, and therefore both damp and windowless. William's smoke lasted so long that his visitor began to get drowsy, and could hardly see when Pike at length led the way to the back-room, with a lighted candle in his hand. Once inside this room, in which were a bed and some rotten old chairs, he told his stupified victim to seat himself, while he brought out the things; and then he pretended to fumble under the bed in the darkness for what was not there. He was still searching when the old man fell asleep where he sat; and then the thief and his wife tossed him on the bed, and deftly searched his pockets for the keys of the house, after taking that of the garden-door from his nerveless finger. William and his wife cursed not a little as they did so, for not a trace of keys was to be found. There was the garden-door key, and a shabby purse containing a few shillings, but nothing more. All this was awkward, as it upset William's arrangement to go out to the house as soon as it was dark, and while the old man slept, strip it of all that was valu-

able, return the keys to the pocket of the drugged man, and leave him lying in some far-off spot to wake at his leisure. There was still hope, however; and as soon as it was dark Pike got out to the house, unlocked the garden-gate, and tried the doors of the house, only to find that they were far too securely fastened for him to hope to force them. He now had it in his power to do two things—to give up the attempt, or to try a more daring crime; and I need not say that his choice fell on the latter alternative. This is the invariable course which all crime runs, from petty thieving to murder and the gallows. Pike returned to his den to find that his victim still slept; but while he was fiercely taking supper, and planning his new crime, there was a kicking at the door of the inner cellar to intimate that the prisoner had awakened. Pike took down a heavy bludgeon, and unlocked the inner door himself; coolly stepping into the dark hole, candle in hand, and locking the door after him.

“Well; what do you want?” he said at last.

“I’ve been asleep, and I want out,” was the simple reply. “Why did you lock the door?”

“To keep you in,” answered Pike, insolently, no longer keeping on the mask.

“Take care what you say, sir, or I’ll have the police to you,” cried the old man, after an interval of thought.

“Will you! How will you get them to hear you?”

There was a horrified pause, during which the old man evidently reviewed his situation, and did not like the prospect, for he sat down trembling and pale on the edge of the bed, and stared helplessly at his jailor.

“Do you mean to say you have trapped me, and mean to keep me here against my will?” he faintly ejaculated.

“No, no; trapped is a hard word. You came here of your own accord, didn’t you?”

“Yes; and now I want to leave, for I neither like you nor the hole you live in.”

“Ah, but I want something from you first.”

“What?”

“The keys of the house you live in.”

The old man remained silent for some time, staring at his brutal jailor with a sinking heart, and realising his position for the first time. The whole had been a carefully prepared plot, and the robbery of his brother’s house was the object.

“I haven’t them,” he faintly responded, when he found voice.

"I know that, for I've looked your pockets," coolly returned Pike; "but you know where they are—where you put them after you came out of the house and locked the door."

The old man was silent. By an arrangement with his brother, who had a duplicate key of the garden-door, and sometimes visited the house at intervals, during the holidays, the actual keys of the house were left hanging under a clump of ivy near the garden-door, that he might be able to enter the house at any time, even if his brother were absent. It was not likely, however, that the man who had trapped him would dream of looking for them there, and the moment's thought gave him courage and hope.

"You surely do not imagine for a moment that I will help you to commit a robbery?" he at last exclaimed. "I would die sooner than do that to my own brother."

"I hope not, for I mean to try you," said Pike, darkly. "Now, look here. You see you're in my power, and can't get a soul to come near you. You might shout yourself blind and no one would hear you; though I may tell you that the minute you try that game on I mean to let you have this on your nob, as heavy as I can lay it on;" and he slowly and suggestively waved the bludgeon within an inch of the old man's nose. "Of course, I can break into the place if I've a mind to, while I have you safe here under lock and key, but I don't want to damage the door and windows, or make a noise, or have any fuss about it. Just you say quietly where the keys is, or it'll be worse for you—*death*, for all that I know."

"I'll soon be missed and sought for!" said the old man, with more resolution than he felt. "You may do what you please, I shall not say where the keys are."

"Then we'll keep you here till you rot," savagely returned Pike. "And very likely we'll break into the place all the same. It was only to save trouble that I thought I'd give you the chance to give us the keys. When they find the house robbed and open, and you missing, of course they'll say you done it, and as long as they live they'll look on you as an old thief and swindler."

"And what would they call me if I helped you to the keys?" scathingly retorted the old man.

Pike was not good at reply, so he made no answer but to leave the hole and lock the door after him. There was no window or fireplace in the damp and frousy den, and Pike took the light with him. so poor old Mr Brownings was

left in a darkness that might almost have been cut with a knife.

The situation was horrible and depressing, but solitude and darkness with some develop reflection. Mr Brownings was not deficient in quickness and intelligence, though his retired life had made him scarcely fit to rub shoulders with the active and work-a-day world, and all his thoughts and energies were now turned on one question—How could he circumvent and outwit the villain who had played him such a dastardly trick? In a contest of cunning the man of education in the long run has generally the best of it. Mr Brownings thought of dozens of plans before morning, and at last resolved to try one of them, the ingenuity of which alone has induced me to recall the case.

When Pike entered the den next morning with an apology for a breakfast in his hands, he found his prisoner lying on the bed listless and pallid, and evidently agreeing badly with the confinement and “change of air.”

“You don’t look so smart this morning,” he said with exultation; “are you going to say where them keys is and have done with it?”

“No, I am not well; I hope I’ll die,” feebly returned the prisoner.

“Wouldn’t you like me to bring you a first-rate doctor to feel your poultice and set you up again?” said Pike, with brutal humour.

To this the old man made no answer, and Pike soon tiring of the silence of his victim, retired. In the afternoon, however, on revisiting the den, he found the breakfast untouched, and the old man still lying on the bed with drooping eyes and pallid aspect, and began to get alarmed.

“You can have a drop of drink, if you like,” he suggested, that being his universal medicine for all ailments.

“No; that would kill me,” said the old man with a shudder. “Go away and let me die. The medicine I want you cannot get.”

“Don’t know about that. I’ll get my wife to bring you a pennyworth of anything from the doctor’s shop if you give it a name,” said Pike in sudden generosity.

“That would not do; what I need is an expensive prescription; and I’m not sure if they would give it without a doctor’s line,” said the old man.

“Write it down on a bit of paper, and promise to tell me

where the keys is hid, and I'll try," said Pike; and to this proposal the old man, with feigned reluctance, at last agreed.

Raising himself in bed, he took the scrap of paper and a pencil placed before him by Pike, and heading it with the usual cabalistic R, wrote down, *in Latin*, a message, of which the following is a free translation:—

"I am a prisoner in a den off the Cowgate; for heaven's sake get the assistance of the law, and have the bearer followed and me set free. The man who trapped me means to rob my brother's house at the south side of the city."

The old man would have put down more, but he was afraid of rousing the suspicions of the watchful Mr Pike, by making the thing look too much like a letter. The more effectually to carry out the deception, he had arranged the message in separate lines, with figures representing imaginary grains, scruples, and drams at the end of each. The whole he signed with his initials only, "T. B.," trusting to good fortune, or the activity of the police, to do the rest.

Pike could read pretty fluently, and he grimly took the strange prescription in his hand and gravely tried to spell it through.

"What in the mischief is all this;" he cried at last. "I can't read the half of it?"

"I daresay; there are words and names that only a chemist can understand. They've a language of their own, you know," said the old man, with affected indifference; and then, as he weakly sank back on the bed and spoke no more, Pike was forced to retire to study long and profoundly the paper with the help of his wife. The first words in the curious prescription chanced to be "*Sum vinctus*," and these suggested to Pike a brilliant and economical idea.

"Some vinctus?" he said to his wife, who was equally at a loss with the paper. "what the deuce is 'vinctus,' I wonder—some simple thing like castor oil or senna and salts, I'll swear? Them chemists, you know, are awful cheats, and puts it on fearful when the thing is writ on a bit paper. I know what I'll do. I'll just go in an ax 'some vinctus'—say a pennyworth—for a sick child, and take my own bottle, and I'll get the same that they'd be charging half-a-crown for."

This seemed a cheap and at the same time effectual way of getting at the required information regarding the keys, and cordially approved of by the wife of the thief, who sagely remarked that, even if the medicine wasn't quite right, "he'd

never know the differ," and by that time they would know about the keys. So Pike took a lengthy stroll across the city to a quarter in which he was not likely to be known, and, boldly entering a chemist's shop, asked for "a pennyworth of vinctus." Unfortunately for Pike, his knowledge of Latin pronunciation, either of the Scotch or English schools, was wofully deficient, and the chemist, though clever and skilful, failed to recognise the word, and said—

"I don't know what you mean. What is it for?"

"It's for a poor sick child."

"Oh, indeed. Then you had better bring a prescription from a doctor."

"But it'll cost more that way, won't it?" cautiously demurred Mr Pike.

"Sixpence more."

"Oh, well, if it's only sixpence I don't mind. The fact is I have a prescription, but I thought I'd save you the trouble reading it, and just ax the thing straightforrard;" and he produced the dirty scrap of paper and placed it in the chemist's hands.

The man read it through in wonder and growing excitement, and, not quite able to control his surprise, exclaimed when he had finished—

"Who wrote this—this prescription?"

"It was the doctor, I s'pose. I don't know his name, but it's all right, I s'pose, isn't it?"

"Yes, oh yes; it's right," returned the chemist; "but it'll be rather an expensive prescription for you—that is, it'll take an hour or two to make up. If you call back in a couple of hours I could have it ready for you."

Pike was about to ask somewhat precipitately how much the thing would cost him; but then reasoning that he could refuse to take it, and so ingeniously throw the useless mixture back on the man's hands if he thought it too dear, he said that he would call back for it, and left the shop.

The moment he was fairly out of sight, the chemist re-read the strange message, and leaving the shop in charge of an assistant, took a cab to the Police Chambers and asked for me. He then read over to me something like the translation I have given, and asked what was to be done. There was very little time to decide, but I resolved in the first place to watch the shop and see if the cautious messenger was one of my "bairns," and thus get some idea of the whereabouts of the trapped man. I drove back with the chemist, and that gentleman, having

made up a bottle of harmless stuff, affixed to it a label bearing in Latin the message—

“Experienced officers are tracking the bearer, and you will soon be free.”

When I had been about an hour in the back-room of the shop the door was opened, and Pike appeared and asked if the medicine was ready. Watching him keenly through a chink of the door, I failed to recognise him. Indeed, Pike up to that moment had not passed through my hands, and his home was unknown to me. I therefore decided not to arrest him, as my object was to release the captive rather than make William a prisoner, and to arrest Pike might have been only to seal his lips and tie our hands. I signalled to the chemist to let him leave after handing him the bottle, and for form's sake charging him a shilling for its harmless contents.

Pike seemed to have not a shadow of suspicion or fear, for after leaving the shop he never once looked round or seemed to know he was being followed, and whistled most of the way as cheerily as if he had just done a virtuous action. On reaching the Cowgate he turned up the close to his den, and I, before following, paused to send a message up to the Office by the man on the beat. Then I entered the close, and took up my stand in a stair opposite Pike's cellar, to impatiently await the arrival of M'Sweeny and the other men I had sent for.

While I waited Pike had delivered the medicine to his prisoner, who read the message on the label, and at once, in the joy of the moment, revealed to his captor where the keys were kept. Pike thereupon locked up his prisoner, and left him in charge of his wife, while he proceeded in the dusk to test the accuracy of the information. With dismay and chagrin I saw him leave the cellar and ascend the close, and realised that I was in a desperate fix. I could not leave the spot without giving directions to the men, and to remain was to lose sight of Pike's valued person. In the eager anxiety of the moment I ran down to the foot of the close to see if they were coming, and at the dark entry mouth nearly knocked over M'Sweeny, who, thinking I was some fugitive, nearly collared me before I could speak.

“Come here, quick,” I cried, in an excited whisper, as I led him and the other two men up the close to the cellar door. “Break in there at once, and take all that are in it to the Office. Then get the address of the house from the gentleman, and go there and watch the house.”

I was off with a run as I uttered the orders, and darted out

at the top of the close just as the crash inwards of the door before M'Sweeny's heavy frame reached my ears. I was just in time to see Pike turning the corner of North College Street to go south, and I did not again lose sight of him till he entered the garden-gate of Mr Brownings' house, which he opened as boldly as if it had been his own. I allowed him to enter, noticed that he did not lock the gate after passing within, and then, allowing him free range of the premises, quietly waited for my comrades. In half-an-hour a cab dashed up to the spot, from which descended M'Sweeny and his assistants, with the released prisoner, Mr Brownings. We opened the garden-gate, passed up the walk, entered the house by the front door, and then confronted Pike in the act of tying up a quantity of silver plate into a table-cloth, for convenience in removal. As he was pounced upon by the men and handcuffed, I thought he was petrified at beholding or possibly recognising me; but, following the direction of his protruding eyes, I saw that they were chained to the smiling and triumphant face of his late prisoner.

"My God! how the blank, blank, blank did you get here?" was all he could gasp out.

He had left the man entombed, as he thought, without the possibility of communicating with any one, and there he was before him smiling, and surrounded with police officers, with their respective positions suddenly and magically inverted. That was what staggered and astounded him so much that he scarcely thought of the fact that he was in our hands, and booked for a heavy sentence; that was what sealed his lips and made him stare about him dazed and stupid-looking, as a man just awakened from a dream.

At the Office, when we entered, some one said to me—

"Where have you been?" to which I answered—

"I've been fishing, and have just landed a beautiful Pike;" whereat sweet William scowled like a bandit, and looked as if he could have struck me if his hands hadn't been fastened, and he hadn't been a great coward.

His cleverness got him seven years and his wife five, and the way they both swore under their breath at the trial when the expensive prescription was explained and translated was a pleasure to behold. Pike, as he was led downstairs, continued to swear, and repeat pathetically as a refrain—

"I wish I'd knowed Latin; I'd have did the blank, blanks! I'd have did them!"

DEAD BEAT: AN INCIDENT OF THE BANK FAILURE.

“THIEF! thief! stop thief!” What a thrilling, excited start every one gives when the words suddenly swell out in a crowded thoroughfare like the South Bridge! And with a professional ferret like myself, of course, the feeling is stronger and more electric—a sudden tingling, running straight to fingers and heels, banishing fatigue or indifference like a flash, and giving instantly the power to fly like the wind, and struggle and fight, and hold on tooth and nail to the fugitive till the slower crowd dash up, and he is either pinned rigidly to the pavement, or handcuffed, or battered senseless as he struggles.

I was standing with M’Sweeny near the Cowgate railings, on the South Bridge, one day in January, when this cry suddenly ended our conversation. The time was about three in the afternoon, the day frosty, and the snow-scraped pavements glassy with thin ice. Three months of continual frost and snow were gone, and other three were to come. We were, indeed, in the midst of a “hard winter,” in more senses than one.

“Look out, Barney!—there! he’s past! gone towards Chambers’ Street,” was all I had time to shout out, when, with the fleetness of a trained runner, the figure of a man, bearing a canvas cash-bag in his hand, was past us and out of sight in a moment. M’Sweeny, in obedience to a snap of my fingers after the flying figure, followed at his fastest and disappeared; while I lingered to join the foremost of the shouting crowd—a hatless gentleman, whom I had recognised as a well-known investment broker, whom I may call Dalglish. I had caught a glimpse, and no more, of the face and figure of the fugitive—a bloodless, dingy-hued, hungry face, considering that the man was young—and was anxious to make sure that he was the culprit, and not some confederate set on to lead us astray.

“What’s wrong? been robbed?” I cried, running hard as I spoke.

"Yes—over fifty pounds in notes and silver—gone at a whip," he pantingly gasped in reply. "You're M'Govan, I think, the detective? For goodness' sake, don't let the villain out of sight."

"A young man, was he? Very gaunt and starved like?"

"Yes, yes. He flew past you just a moment ago."

"Miserably clothed, I thought, too. I'm sure I saw his bare soles shining through his boots as he ran."

"Same scoundrel. I know him. His name's Morison. Snatched the bag out of my hand at the very bank door, and ran like lightning before I could draw a breath."

"A discharged clerk of yours, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! his father was a merchant of some kind, but retired through ill health, and invested in the City of Glasgow shares through us last summer, and came down in October with the bank. I know very little about them."

"Perhaps he had been waiting for you and watching his chance?"

"I don't know—likely enough. They had to give up everything, and have been out of sight ever since. I should scarcely have known him, he was so ragged and changed. It was the glare of his eyes as he wrenched the cash-bag out of my hands that made me sure of him."

We had now reached the head of Guthrie Street, a new road leading down to the Cowgate, but all trace of the fugitive, and M'Sweeny as well, was lost. A gabbling inquiring crowd surrounded us, apparently quite ignorant of what brought them there; and not wishing so much company in my searches, I advised Mr Dalglish to get back to the bank door, at which his hat had blown off and been left lying, and then go up to the Office and report formally, assuring him that it was possible he might find the fugitive there before him, in M'Sweeny's keeping. This movement had the effect of dividing the crowd, and after a moment I got rid of my share by going into a stair further down, crossing a back yard, and getting out into the Cowgate below. There I stood at a provision shop window, staring vacantly at knuckles of salt pork and lumps of Irish butter, and having a good think. The brief words of the man robbed, and the glimpse I had had of the thief, gave me an instinctive feeling that I had a disagreeable task before me. I secretly began to hope that I should not find the thief.

A few minutes later, and further down the street, I came upon M'Sweeny, looking very important and breathless, but without any prisoner.

"You've lost him, then?" I said, with an appearance of disappointment and disgust.

"Begorra, Jamie, if it had been you, you'd have lost him twice over, he ran so nimble," said my chum, with energy. "The legs isn't grown yet that'll bate him. Who was he now, d'ye know? I mane, which of 'our bairns?'"

"None of them," I said moodily, though with a grim smile as I spoke; "this one's out of another family entirely. He's an outsider."

"Whew! that's one of the kind you like to get hould of, to make one of your murderin' stories out of. You'll want to ketch him moighty hard, I know; that's why you're sulky wid me, after me near killing myself with a run that Deerfoot couldn't have aqualled."

"There you're wrong, for I don't particularly want to catch him. But there's about fifty pounds gone with him, and we must get that. It's a pity he didn't throw it down. Where did you lose him?"

"Where did I lose him? Faix, ye might as well ax where the darkness flies to when you light the gas. He *wint*—that's all I know."

"As usual," I growled.

"Yes, always active, and smart, and able for me work, Jamie," said M'Sweeny with elation. "I'll be that long after you're laid on the shelf, like an ould bone that's been picked clean, and is good for nothing but pounding into dust."

"He'll be somewhere about the Cowgate, I suppose?" I suggested, knowing from experience that M'Sweeny always came off best in banter, whatever he might do in work.

"The Cowgate, is it? If he ran that way all the time, he'll be nearer the moon by this time. Hows'ever, it was hereabouts I lost him."

"Well, you can go after that other business and leave this job to me. I've an idea how to get him."

"Troth, I expicted that, after you've drawed all the ideas out of me, and then you'll get all the credit for the job. Och, Jamie, but you're cunning, cunning!"

"I'm afraid there'll be little credit in it, to us at least," I quietly answered; and thus we parted, M'Sweeny to look after a pawnbroker's affair at the south side, and I to pursue my work alone. Curiously enough, the idea of tracing the daring thief had come to me when staring in at the provision shop window. Provisions—food—that was the thought. Starva-

tion—or at least want—was written in the thief's whole aspect; what could be more natural, if this had goaded him to the crime, than that the first-fruits of the crime should be spent in relieving that craving? I began with the provision shops and bakers where I stood, and slowly worked my way down to the foot of the street at Cowgate Port, making careful inquiries in each for a late customer answering the description I have given. I got no trace of him, however, and retraced my steps and began with the upper portion of the street, and thus worked my way towards the Grassmarket. Then I *did* come on a clue as good as a detective could wish for. I had asked the usual questions about a young man, haggard and shiny-eyed, buying provisions—such as bread and the common necessities—when the woman in the shop, unlike the most I had questioned, brightened and said—

“Oh, you must mean the Morisons up the next entry?”

“I do mean the Morisons and no others,” I responded, with a sudden thrill at the discovery; “did they get anything, say about an hour ago?”

“Yes, they did, and paid for it honourably—the young man himself—and said he'd settle for all the other things to-morrow. I knew they were honest from the first, though my man said I had better no trust them owre muckle.”

“Oh, they've run up an account with you, then?” I said, making no comment on the supposed honesty of her customer.

“Yes, they're gentry, you know, come down through the Bank, and were sair against takin' on onything at first, but there's been trouble in the family, and——”

“Would you direct me to the house? I have some—some business with them,” I stammered, liking my task worse than ever.

“'Deed will I, though it was three times as far,” cried the woman with great readiness; and calling a girl from the back-shop to take her place, she at once led me out of the shop and up to a worn and slimy stair in a low entry close by, telling me, on the way, in a confidential whisper, that she secretly suspected that they were “furrer doon the brae than maist folk thocht.” I began to think that the warm-hearted woman was not far wrong.

I counted the storeys as I went up, and duly turned into the passage on the third, as I had been directed; but though I asked at every door, as I explored, I found no one who knew anything of such a name. At last, one Irish labourer said it

might be the folks in the "little room at the back," and thither I went, on learning that the said room was the home of a family not many months in the place. With the help of some matches, which I struck after the abrupt closing of the door, I found the door, and was told, in answer to my knock, to "Come in." I turned the handle, and stepped within, to find that the little hole was not in darkness, as I had expected. A candle, evidently fresh from the shop, was stuck in a bottle on the mantelpiece and lighted; while on a chair in a corner lay a loaf and some other provisions still in their wrappings. Further back was a straw mattress, with some rags for a pillow, and a man's overcoat for a coverlet; and on this lay a young girl of some twelve years, who was being raised a little, as I entered, by an old man, who knelt in front of the rude couch. Nothing else was visible in the room. There was no fire, and the air was icy cold.

After the old man had adjusted the position of the sick girl to his satisfaction, he turned to me; but a want of intelligence or brightening in his glance made me look at him more keenly, and then I dimly understood, by his half-groping walk across the floor, that he was blind. Then my eye wandered to the panting and wasted shadow on the mattress, and I instinctively uncovered my head, for one look told me that the Reaper whose name is Death hovered near.

"I don't see well," said the old man, addressing the direction of the door; "indeed," (and he gave a shivering gesture towards the sick girl), "I am almost blind."

"You are Mr Morison, I believe?" I said.

"Yes; and you, I suppose, are the missionary? The minister wouldn't come when my son James went for him. There was a time when the best would have come at my bidding, but that's all past now—all past;" and a deep sigh and a tremulous clasping of the blue cold hands finished the sentence.

"I am not the missionary. My name is M'Govan; but I did call on account of your son," I stammered, feeling worse than if I had been the chased instead of the hunter.

"It was very kind of you to come, Mr M'Govan," said the old man, perfectly unsuspecting, and putting out a cold hand to feel for my own in grateful confidence. "This is my daughter, May. She has been very poorly, and the severe weather has been against her. May, dearie, here's a kind gentleman come to see you instead of the missionary. Sit down, sir;" and he hastily groped his way to the solitary

chair, cleared it of the packages, and forced me to be seated close to the bed on the floor. "My son will be here in a little. He has only gone up to George Square to get a better doctor. I'm afraid the parish one doesn't do her a bit of good; and James has at last induced that man Dagleish to give up some of the money he so cruelly swindled us out of; so we can afford to get the best advice."

I bent over the sick girl in silence. I could not have spoken though my life had depended on it. The girl lay panting fearfully, with her intensely bright eyes fixed on my face; but a slight motion of the fingers of her thin hand showed that she wished me to take them within my own, which I hastened to do. The gentle clasp seemed to give her strength, for in a moment or two she turned to the old man with an eager whisper.

"I feel cold, father. Would you go down to the yard and see if they are coming with the coals and wood?"

All this was said in gasps; and when she had finished, and the old man was eagerly tottering out of the room to obey, I took out my handkerchief to wipe the thick beads of perspiration from her temples. As I did so I saw the tears creep into the bright eyes, and then the lashes drooped and they overflowed.

But the moment the door closed, her fingers tightened on my own, and with an intensely eager look she turned to me, half raising herself from the bed.

"Father doesn't know I'm so ill—he doesn't see me—he is quite blind, though he wishes me not to know it, and says every day how well I am looking," she painfully whispered. "I just sent him away to tell you the truth."

"The truth?" I echoed, with a slight start, thinking of the robbery.

"Yes, the parish doctor was here yesterday, and I asked him to tell me all he knew—quiet, you know, so that father shouldn't hear him."

"Well, dear?"

"He looked into my throat. You know I can hardly get breath, and the room always seems as if there was no air in it, and he says he can do nothing for me—I cannot get better—I am dying."

"And you were startled and a little frightened, eh?"

"No, no; I am not afraid to die; I am only afraid to tell father. It's him I'm troubled about. What will he do without me? That's why I wanted a minister or a missionary to come. Will you tell him for me, as I don't want to break his heart.

and now there's so little time? I think my brother James suspects the truth, but my father thinks I've only caught cold and will soon be well again."

Here was a task indeed! I sat back trembling, and mentally wishing I had rather been set on to face the most desperate of house-breakers than that feeble and trusting blind man. Before I could collect my thoughts for a reply—for the words had come out in slow and painful gasps with long pauses between—a footstep sounded at the door, and the old man appeared bearing a lump of coal and some chopped wood, with which he proceeded to build a fire.

"May must be thought of first, you know," he observed to me, with affected cheeriness. "I called her May, because she was a May flower, and we wanted her path through life to be soft and lovely, as if strewn with flowers. It hasn't been quite that, Mr M'Govan, especially since the Bank failure, when we gave up everything, and lost all my savings besides; but there's better times coming, now; isn't there, May, dearie?"

A faint whisper came from the rude bed which was meant for a "Yes, father, dear," but it was choked off abruptly, and I saw the lips quiver and the eyes fill as the girl's words ceased. The old man stopped in his fire building, and listened intently in the direction of the bed.

"May, dearie, you're not—not crying?"

"No, father; I'm smiling," she answered, banishing the look of anguish with a quick effort; "come and feel my face and you'll see."

A troubled smile took the place of the look of concern, and the blind man appeared to look in the direction of the child.

"Yes, I see you're smiling, May. Oh, my eyes are not so bad yet but I can see you, though they're worse than they were. You know, Mr M'Govan, it was my failing sight made me give up business and invest in Bank stock. It was so sure and safe, that scoundrel Dalglish told me, and the dividend was sure to rise in a year or so to fourteen or fifteen per cent. And all the while the rascal knew the Bank was coming down, or at least tottering. He as good as admitted it to me in his office when the crash came. My sight got worse then—the shock did it; and all my friends became blind at the same time; or if they weren't, their pity was worse than their shunning." The old man's voice became broken and wavery as he spoke, and he kept his face persistently turned towards the fire, that the sick girl might not see his tear-wet cheeks.

"Now that the worst is past, Mr M'Govan, I don't mind telling you that we ate nothing all yesterday, and only a crust the day before," he hastily continued. "The parish doctor, I think, suspected something, for he offered to have some things sent us from the poorhouse; but I got so frightfully angry at the insult that he apologised, and said no more. No! it shall never be said that Robert Morison became a pauper. That's what I said to James this morning when we woke to our hunger and cold. He said, 'Father, we're *dead beat* now; I don't see anything for it but the poorhouse.' Mr M'Govan, the words went through me like a knife, to think that they should come from a son of mine! Yet I could not blame him, for it was love for us prompted the shameful proposal, and he was always a good son. He wouldn't wrong any one of a penny, Mr M'Govan, though he were to drop dead with hunger; and when all our troubles are past, I'll be able to go up to the throne of God, and say, 'Here am I, and the little ones Thou hast given me.' That's what keeps me up in all my trials; and I'll be able to see their bright faces again then, smiling and glorious—at least, better than I can now," he added, in sudden correction.

I remained silent, busy with the sick girl, who had great difficulty in breathing, and seemed to think that she was easier when supported in my arms; but my thoughts were busy, and pictured to me a sudden and awful awakening to the trusting father when his son should return. I even began to long desperately that the lad might be nipped up outside.

"When I saw the boy so low in spirits, as well he might be," softly continued the old man, "I said to him, 'Go out once more—for the last time. I don't think God will let us perish.'"

"And I said I would pray for him," painfully gasped the young girl. "I could have done it better if I had more air. There is so little down in this awful place."

"And not an hour ago he came in with money, clinking silver and soft bank notes," triumphantly added the old man, his sightless eyeballs fairly glistening with rapture. "Then I forgot, in my joy, hunger and everything else but May. I couldn't eat, and James was the same; and he ran off for a better doctor at once. Perhaps he may get work now—he was a bank clerk, you know—and then all our troubles will be over. I don't mind the loss of the money a bit now; May and my son are all I wish to keep. They are treasures that no one can steal."

I looked at the sunken face and bright eyes of the panting girl as he spoke, and my heart fairly stood still. I fancied I saw a change on her face even then. In the dead silence which followed, even the old man's attention was attracted to the quickened sounds, and he drew closer to the bed, and felt for her hand.

"May, dearie, are you in pain?"

"No, not now, father dear," she managed to whisper. Then, after a moment, she faintly added, "Kiss me, father."

The old man hurriedly obeyed; and then was saying something about the new doctor being there soon, when the girl said, "I can scarcely breathe, father dear—is there enough air in the room? Would you open the window, and let in more?"

The old man turned his face to the light as he rose to obey; and then for the first time I saw a shade of alarm creep across his features. It was not grief, nor pallor; it was simply thought—a sudden startling awakening.

The window was opened, and an icy breeze swept into the empty room. Then as suddenly as she had spoken before, the poor girl said—

"Father—come here—close, closer. I'm afraid—I'm going there before you—I'm going there now."

A stony look, which I shall never forget, crept over the old man's face; and I saw him put out a shaking hand to feel the soft face of the young girl. His fingers touched the trickling tears, and then he started as if he had been stung, and looked as if death was wrenching at his heart.

"No, no, May, dearest flower of my heart! it is not so bad," he cried, after the first stunning shock was over. "We are to get over our troubles now; and—hush! there's James at last—the new doctor will soon put you right."

The door opened, and my prisoner that was to be entered the room. He started and paled as his eye fell on the death-dewed face of the young girl; then his eyes travelled to me with a curiosity not unmingled with alarm.

"May feels rather worse, James—did you not bring the doctor?" said the old man with forced calmness.

"He will come in an hour or two," said the haggard young man, taking his place by the bedside, with tears welling from his eyes, "and this——"

"This is Mr M'Govan, a kind—" began the father; but with the first mention of the name the culprit started, and became

more death-like than the girl in his arms. Then his eyes met mine, and that single glance told all.

"Not here! not now!" he whispered in desperation to me under his breath, while the old man said something to the girl; "it will kill her. I will try to get away in a minute. I was dead beat, and the temptation was too much. It was for her I did it. God above us knows it was not for myself."

I said nothing, and at the same moment the dying girl tugged his hand sharply.

"I am not to get better," I heard her whisper; "kiss me twice."

A little later, she cried in evident pain, "More air! more air! oh, if you would carry me outside, I think I could breathe!" Then her father's shaking hand touched her face, a smile beamed on her lips, flickered a moment and became fixed; and a second or two later she was at rest for ever. The old man appeared the least moved in the room. He listened to the last sigh with a face like marble, and then ran his fingers over the still features of the dead, saying, "God has taken my May flower to Himself; I wish I could say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!'"

But a worse trial was to come. The son, after the first shock was over, produced the cash-bag, with the money, less that which he had spent, and placed them in my hands; and then we broke the news as gently as possible to the old man.

"I was dead beat, father, and thought May might be saved if I could only get her the nice nourishing things the doctor spoke of," pleaded the son in desperation as the old blind man turned from him, wringing his hands in awful silence.

"And now you are a thief and a robber!" cried the old man. "You—my son—a thief! O God, this is too much!"

"But it was Dalgleish's money. I saw him with it in his hand at the Bank door, looking so sleek and well-fed, and I thought of you and what you might have been. Oh, father! don't turn away from me and curse me. God knows it wasn't for myself, and I was faint and my brain turned at the moment."

"No, I won't curse you—God wouldn't curse you; but take him away, detective, and leave me alone with my treasure! Thank God, she has been taken to Heaven without knowing!" And not another word could we get from the old man. He crouched down by the rude bed and still fair form; and thus I was forced to leave him while I took young Morison away and had him locked up. We had the old man watched during

the night, and in the morning he was brought up to bear witness to the truth of my statements and those of the prisoner. Dalglish was there too; and as he was submitted to a rigorous cross-examination, from which, though he admitted nothing, it was quite evident that he had believed the Bank to be in a shaky condition when he induced Mr Morison to take the shares in it off his hand, the Sheriff, in the course of some stinging remarks, characterised him as a heartless scoundrel, more deserving of being at the bar than the prisoner. Then other friends of the prisoner spoke glowingly and eloquently, and I gave the facts much as I have here put them down; and in the end the Sheriff, taking all into consideration, simply ordered the prisoner to be dismissed. The blind father then groped towards the bar, and getting his hands on his son, and clasping him tight to his breast, said brokenly, "Forgive my hard words, Jimmy; you're no thief to me! We'll go forth and face the world together."

But that was not the end of it, for blindness had not come on all their friends; and the son, through their influence, shortly after removed to an excellent situation in England, taking his father with him. I had a letter from him last May, regarding the planting of some flowers on the grave of his sister; and from it I learned that he is now as much trusted and respected as he was before he was so completely dead beat.

A SPLUTTER OF INK.

THEY were fastening up sheets of brown paper inside the windows of the house to keep the sun off the carpet, and intimate to their friends that they were at the country, when "Thin Edge," or Edgey, passed along the street. It was a fashionable place over in the New Town, every house in which was a main-door one; and, considering the pickings such places generally afford to the diligent house-breaker, ever intent on catching the early worm, it is not surprising that Thin Edge paused to view the operation. Edgey was lanky and lean as a skeleton, besides which he was a great coward; but as he generally worked with a dumpy, bull-necked companion, whose name I shall mercifully change to Ben Touser, and who did not shrink at many things when his blood was up, Edgey's failings did not stand out so prominently.

Ben I had known since we were boys attending the Canon-gate Burgh School, playing "shoo-dick" and "bools" together, and occasionally taking a trot down to Portobello on our bare feet to cool ourselves by half-a-dozen bathes in the sea. But he had developed to a thief, and I to a thief-hunter. He was a full-blown criminal when I became a detective, but his face was one of those which do not alter much, and, though we passed each other as strangers, I knew him perfectly and he me. If there was any shame in him at all, I believe it came to the surface when he contrasted his debased condition with the position and respect I had gained.

Ben was a mere animal, however—a low, vulgar brute of the type which, as often as not, leaves the world by means of the gallows. He did not attempt to plan work—he left that to Edgey—and here was a rare chance for the skinny scoundrel who had brain but no courage.

A ticket newly pasted on one of the windows intimated that all letters and parcels were to be left at a grocer's at the other end of the town, thus emphasising the intimation which the mute brown paper on the other windows was making. It was

as plain as if it had said, "House entirely deserted—abundance of valuables within—burglars, walk in and take what you please."

Edgey noted the house, and moved off so as not to attract undue attention, and returning at leisure, found a cab at the door, and the family in the act of leaving. It was a family of grown-up daughters. There were six or seven of them, all apparently of an age, and so like each other that a lover jilted by one would have had no difficulty in consoling himself with another. There was a shabby little father, who was bustling about and helping with the luggage like a light porter, and a portly mamma who would have weighed down four of him easily; and Edgey began to curiously speculate as to whether they meant to cram all that load into one poor cab. In a minute or two they attempted the monstrous cruelty, and were only dissuaded when the cabman threatened to drive off rather than risk his cab, his licence, and his horse. There were nearly half-a-dozen boxes or baskets; and even when they were piled on the pavement, the shabby father said something about "the heavy one," and, looking round, asked Edgey if he would mind giving the cabman a lift out with a box. Edgey didn't mind—he was of a particularly obliging disposition, and followed the gentleman at once. The servant, who had now finished fastening up the brown paper, was despatched for another cab; and then Edgey, the cabman, and Mr Woodford, entered a bedroom at the back, and were in the act of lifting the trunk by the handles, when the lock suddenly gave way and a number of dresses bounced up.

"Don't say anything to them, or they'll take an hour to pack them in again," said Mr Woodford, alluding to his wife and daughters, who were chattering and laughing outside, and, at the same time, cramming them ruthlessly down, and making Edgey sit on the lid; "I'll see if I can get a rope."

He left the room for the kitchen, and, a moment after, the cabman said—

"I have a bit of rope in the cab. I'll bring it."

Thus Edgey for the merest second of time was left alone in the room. He gave a swift glance round, gently rose from the box, glided to the window, and drew back the sash fastener; then, hearing the returning footsteps of Mr Woodford, he got back to the trunk, squeezed down the lid, and resumed his perch as solemnly as a monkey after emptying a sugar-bowl.

The box was tied up with rope and carried out to the cabs, and then Edgey professed the deepest gratitude when rewarded with a sixpence for his trouble, after he had assisted in placing the luggage on the cabs. During this operation he had taken care to test the weight of every box and basket, and with a sigh of relief decided that none of them contained the family plate and valuables.

"How lucky for me that them brutes was a-biting of me so bad in bed that I'd to get up earlier nor usual and take a walk," was Edgey's reflection as the cabs drove off.

"Them brutes" meant the "B flats" with which Edgey's home swarmed in hot weather—a clear proof of how our greatest schemes are influenced by trifles.

Edgey went straight to a favourite public-house in Rose Street, and, finding Ben Touser there—influenced possibly by "them brutes" as well—he called for sixpenny worth of whisky, put half of it before his companion, and tossed it off to his usual "Here's luck!"

"Where?" growled Ben, who was disposed to be quarrelsome. "I don't see it."

"No, but you will when I tell you how I earned the money we're drinking," said Edgey with undaunted enthusiasm, and then in a whisper the whole plan was revealed.

Still Ben did not take such a hopeful view of things as his skinny companion.

"Two coachfuls of daughters," he hoarsely growled. "There won't be much to pick up in that house, you take your davy, 'cept dirty ruffles and old hair-pads. So many wimen eat up all the profit."

"Yes, but in a big house like that they're bound to keep up an appearance, or they wouldn't get 'em married off their hands," sagely returned Thin Edge.

"It'll be only an appearance, then," savagely answered Touser. "I've cracked them cribs before—regular swindles—the very lead spoons isn't genuine."

"Ah, but this one's a real tip-top affair—I saw that whenever I set eyes inside the door—and then, think of the windy bein' allready to our hand—at the back of the house, too," warmly rejoined Edgey. "We'll be able to do the thing comfortable and easy, and if they've left any vittuals in the place we needn't be in a particular hurry leaving. It'll be a kind of country lodging for us—nice soft beds and downy pillers, and none of them brutes to trouble us—see?" and Edgey poked his com-

panion with one of the bones he used as fingers, and smiled, and joked, and painted everything in glowing colours, till Touser was almost as hopeful as himself.

The remainder of the day was occupied in making arrangements with different resets for the reception of the plunder they were to secure, and when night came they went down to the empty house, and with some difficulty managed to get into the green behind. Here, much to the chagrin of Touser, they discovered that there was an area flat, and that unless they had had a plank or a ladder to bridge the area, the unfastening of the bedroom window by Edgey was of no use whatever.

If Touser had not been so thoroughly enraged at what he considered Edgey's stupidity, he would not have done anything so rash; but when his companion proposed to steal a ladder or plank he only cursed, and recklessly scrambled down into the area, and coolly prised open the kitchen door with a jemmy which he carried in the "back" pocket of his coat. The door gave way easily, the lock being crazy and worn, and the two house-breakers slipping in, shoved it gently to again, and, taking off their shoes, began a noiseless inspection of the premises. Although Edgey had been positive that not a soul was left in the house, they had both come provided with scraps of crape, with which they cautiously covered their ugly faces before beginning business. They also carried a dark lantern, which was lighted and closed, only to be used in such of the rooms as were closely shuttered. All the others were explored and ransacked by the stray gleams of light from the street lamps or opposite houses.

A very few minutes sufficed to complete the disgust of Touser, and to call from him a thousand expressions of contempt for Edgey's powers.

"A miserable hunk of a place, without as much as a bit of bread and cheese left for a feller," he growled; "and as for plate, where is it?"

"Here's some," said Edgey at last, prising open one of the locked cupboards, and revealing a glittering display of silver. "I knowed what I was after, never you fear."

Touser took one or two of the articles down and examined them inside the press by the aid of his lantern, and then cursed more unguardedly than ever.

"Just as I expected—every blowed bit of it electro-plate—cheapest kind—that would rub off if ye only looked at it. Spoons the same—brass, not even nickle, curse 'em; forks

plated too, but rather thicker, only they're old-fashioned ; been bought at some sale, very like. Curse them, what do they mean by it? Swindling us poor, innocent, hard-working prigs—not an article worth carrying away. Tell ye, Edgey, this age is going all to pot—everything's sham—not a bit of reality about anything. We'll be having sham prigs next, and sham detectives. There should be a bill brought into Parliament making it wrong to use anything but real silver. It don't give us a chance, this condemned electro-plate stuff."

A short exploration of the other rooms, however, convinced them that there was very little else worth lifting, except some dresses and clothes for which they thought they might find a market, if they could only get them safely through the streets to some hiding-place. The electro-plate was accordingly packed up as securely as possible in two pieces of a woollen table-cover, which they tore up for the purpose, and then made up into two parcels and covered with two superfine black coats belonging to Mr Woodford.

At this interesting stage of the proceeding there was to be a slight divertisement which neither had bargained for. While Touser was in the act of tying up his bundle, and with every tug at the string cursing the inventor of electro-plate and his ancestors to the beginning of time, he suddenly paused with a knot unfastened, and exclaimed—

"Sst! isn't that like some one coming in below?"

Both paused and listened breathlessly; and then their hearts almost stood still as they heard a key quietly turned in the lock of the front door below.

"It's the beaks, and we're done for!" cried Edgey, dropping with a squirm on the carpet, and beginning to wring his hands. Touser's reply was to reach over the bundle, and grasp Edgey by the throat and shake him till he was nearly choked.

"If you don't hold your jaw, I'll kill ye!" he hissed, under his breath; and Edgey knowing his disposition, was dumb in a moment.

They then heard the outer door as softly closed as it had been opened, and presently heard the intruder pause close to the hat stand, as if he was, like themselves, divesting himself of his boots before proceeding further.

"If it was a bobby, he'd have locked the door after him, and took out the key before anything," said Touser, in an excited whisper to the sweating coward in his grasp. "Surely it can't be two of a trade spotted the same plant?"

Edgey was unable to pass an opinion, or even to articulate a word, being already half insensible with terror.

There ensued a painful pause—painful to Trouser, because he was puzzled and intently listening for any sound likely to put him right, and painful to Edgey, because sundry movements of the powerful ruffian grasping him seemed to indicate that he was getting out a knife. There was for a moment or two a dead stillness below; then there was a sound like the striking of a match, and opening and closing of a lamp door, and then a soft fall of footsteps on the lobby and stairs leading up to the room in which the housebreakers were breathlessly crouching. With the first foot-fall on the stair Edgey became conscious of a sharp dig in a fleshy part of his body from a pointed weapon, and at the same moment heard Touser whisper—

“Feel it? that’s my knife, and I’ll run it right into your heart if you don’t get up and see who’s coming up the stair. There’s only one on him, and if I’m not able for him single-handed, call me a fool ever after;” and he coolly began to tug out a leaden-headed life-preserver, while Edgey, only too glad to get out of his clutches, crawled to the open door, peered out at the threshold, and down the wide staircase, and then, after a slight hiss of horror, dropped insensible on his belly on the carpet, and that so quietly that Touser, who was noiselessly spitting on his dirty paw—or rather licking it—to give him a secure hold of the murderous “neddy,” was not once conscious of anything particular having happened. Thinking at last that Edgey must be seeing something worth looking at, or he would not be so quiet, Touser crawled to the door-way, grazed his nose and cheek on the nails of Edgey’s boots, and then, as a growling oath rose to his lips, raised his eyes and nearly dropped as inert and overawed as Edgey. In front of him, and coolly stepping on to the first landing of the wide staircase, was the form of a man, in dark outline in all but the face and hands, and these, horrifying to relate, were as luminous as if they had been made of flames. Volumes of sulphurous smoke slowly floated along the glowing features and swinging hands of the strange intruder, and it did not escape the quick observation of Touser that his feet, in ascending the few remaining steps to the landing, made no noise.

“By gum! we’re in for it now!” was Touser’s horrified thought. “It’s Old Nick himself—come to carry one of us away with him. If I could only manage to say ‘God’ or

'Bible,' or some o' them words I used to hear, he'd take fright and fly off, or maybe only grab at Edgely."

As he got out his muttered exclamations, Touser's brute courage oozed entirely away, and he became crumpled up in a trembling heap on the top of his senseless companion. The satanic-looking intruder advanced along the landing and appeared to hesitate, as if not sure of the exact spot in which *his* plunder lay crouching.

"He's quite young-looking, too, for all the hunders o' years he's been going about," reflected the shuddering Touser, vainly wishing for the carpet and boards to open up and swallow him before the flaming fingers should reach out for him. "But the like of him never grows old—he's as spry and nimble to-day as he was when he give Eve the apple—so the gospel-grinder said. Speaks away to hisself, too, in a kind of foreign langwidge—Hebrew, likely—same as Jews speaks."

To the astonishment, not to say relief, of the grovelling and quaking ruffian, the flaming-faced intruder, after speaking to himself for a moment or two in an unknown tongue, turned aside into one of the rooms which the two burglars had not yet explored, the door of which exactly faced that in which Touser lay in a half insensible state. He seemed indeed to vanish into the darkness; but after an interval, Touser's eye was caught by a gleam of light, which was not that suggestive and sulphurous one shimmering from the face and hands; then peering out of the threshold into the far-off room, Touser saw the satanic stranger in the act of bending over a desk, upon which he had turned a tiny stream of light from a lighted lantern in his hand. First he tried a number of keys in the lock of the desk, and all failing to fit, he brought from his pocket a small chisel or screw-driver, the point of which he inserted near the lock, and thus forcibly wrenched open the desk.

"Neatly done—to be sure, he's an old practised hand—at it hunders of years afore I was born," thought Touser, professional interest for the moment banishing fear.

The strange burglar hastily tumbled out the contents of the desk, carelessly tossing aside several bank notes and some postage stamps, as if they had been so much waste paper.

"Doesn't need to take money—can make it by just blowin' on a hot coal or a bit of stone," thought Touser with a shudder. "Wish I could do it—I'd sell my soul this minute—only—no, I'd rather not. It's the going with him I'd object to; why, what's he up to now?"

The flaming hands were busy among a packet of papers, carefully and neatly tied up with pink satin ribbon; the sardonic feature of flame actually seemed to smile with satisfaction as the packet was hastily counted and examined; then the packet was made to vanish about his decidedly modern-looking dress; the lantern was sharply closed, and the flaming face and hands glided noiselessly across the floor and down the wide stair.

Touser, at least, always believed that he went in some such way; but as he had fully expected the next movement to be a demon clutch of the fiery fingers at his own coat-collar or short cropped hair, and the next a downward flight, which should not stop when the ground was reached, his evidence on the point was rather hazy. How the strange intruder left the house must be left to conjecture; but certain it is that the outer door below was left unlocked.

When Edgey recovered consciousness, he found Touser seated on a chair near him refreshing himself by *drinking* a bottle of *eau de cologne*, which was the nearest approach to fire water he could find about the place. Touser had got a bad fright, but it had not prevented him from appropriating the three bank notes so loftily discarded by the satanic intruder, and also—fatal act!—the postage stamps tossed aside with them. Of this prize he said nothing to Edgey, who groaningly raised himself with other things more immediately occupying his thoughts.

“Did you see him?”

Touser growled out an affirmative, and drained the last drop of the *eau de cologne*.

“It was *him*, wasn’t it?” said Edgey, with chattering teeth.

“Same old cove,” answered Touser, affecting a coolness he was far from feeling.

“What was he after? you or me?” whispered Edgey.

“Broke open a desk, and did some hanky panky over the papers in it, and then grinned the way you see him doing in pictures, and went off in blue fire.”

“Wasn’t you frightened?”

“Not much—he’s a neat cracksman, that’s all I’ve got to say; but then consider the practice he’s had.”

“Did I do a flopper when he came in?”

“You did—and I was nigh floppin’ down on top of you,” said Touser, whom the *eau de cologne* had only partly fortified. “My belief is the place is haunted, and the quicker we cut it the better.”

"Without the swag?"

"You can take what ye like; I'll take nothing," was the emphatic reply of Touser, who had the bank notes and stamps in his pocket.

"I think that'll be best," feebly responded Edgey, who was dying to take to his heels and put miles between him and the house of horror; and clinging to his companion, he got down the stairs and out by the back, and thence to their den in Rose Street. Secretly they each believed the apparition to be a warning to them to amend their evil ways, and with that belief came half-formed wishes and intentions after an honest life, which, like the most of such resolves, were soon to be dispelled by that iron hand of fate or circumstance which seems to relentlessly pursue the confirmed jail bird.

The housebreaking was discovered next day and promptly reported to us, when our share in the mystification began. It was clear that the house-breakers had been disturbed or scared in the midst of their operations—the bundles put up ready for lifting proved that; but the puzzling thing was that the back door had been forced in, and yet the front door was found unlocked. The bedroom window being unfastened only helped to deepen the mystery.

So far as we could discover, nothing had been taken from the house, and thus it was reported in next morning's newspapers; but when Mr Woodford and one of his daughters were brought from their country lodgings, the bank notes, postage stamps, and a packet of papers, were at once notified as stolen.

At first little was said about the papers, but next day Mr Woodford appeared in great excitement, and said that whatever it cost, I was to try and get back these papers, which were of no use to any one but himself. Questioned more closely, he vaguely gave me to understand that they were important evidence in a coming law suit, without which he feared he would not only lose his case, but be cast in heavy expenses. Now, I had very little to work upon except the reckless manner in which the back door had been prised in, and that was not unlike Touser's passionate style of going to work. It happened, too, that Touser was brought to the Office dead drunk on the same day, and in searching his pockets there was found, not money, but some three shilling's worth of postage stamps, all in a sheet, and somewhat creased and dirty with his pocket. It was absurd to think that any one in Touser's position should have so much correspondence as to need a supply of stamps

like that: but depending little upon that fact, I went to Mr Woodford and asked if he thought he could identify the stamps stolen. He in turn referred the matter to one of his daughters, whose desk it was which had been broken open, and she eagerly declared that she would know them by a splutter of violet ink with which she one day chanced to mar them. I joyfully produced the stamps, showing the splutter of ink, and as they were identified at a glance, I knew that my case was all right against Touser. Indeed, I was of opinion that he and no other was involved.

I went to his cell as soon as I returned to the Office, and abruptly said—

“Those stamps which you took from the desk in that house you broke into last week have done for you, for they’ve been identified by the owner; now, seeing that you’re booked, I suppose you won’t mind letting me know what you did with the papers you took with them?”

“I took none. I could swear it with my dying breath,” he said, with a curious look over his shoulder. “The devil got the papers.”

“Who?”

“The devil.”

“Who’s he?”

“What! don’t you know *him*?—him that lives down, downstairs, you know;” and he pointed downwards as his voice became hushed.

“Come, come, Ben—no chaffing. These papers are wanted particularly, and I give you my word that you won’t lose by telling what you’ve done with them.”

“That’s all I know about them. The devil came all flaming in sulphur blazes, and took them as neat as if he’d been cracking cribs all his life, and that’s a long word.”

I could get no other answer out of him, and erroneously supposed that he was chaffing as a fence to concealment.

I began to believe, indeed, that he had been employed by some interested person to steal the papers, like “Coreing Jim,” in the incident of “The Veiled Portrait,”* but I was all wrong, as the reader will presently see.

While I was thus probing the case from one side, another had been busy with it also, and that other was Thin Edge.

One day when going along Princes Street, before Touser’s capture, Edgey’s companion suddenly cried—

* See *Hunted Down*, page 41.

"Well, there's that —— devil again! What does he mean by haunting me like this?"

The person thus indicated seemed an aristocratic and foreign-looking gentleman, not at all satanic in appearance, and Edgey at first set down the idea as the offspring of the bad whisky with which Touser's head was certainly at the moment befuddled. Hearing also that the papers taken from the desk were wanted particularly, Edgey thought proper to follow the foreign-looking gentleman the next time he met him. The result was a growing conviction that the noble-looking foreigner and the strange burglar were the same person. The stranger's name was Nicole Chartier; he was a man of wealth, and a scientific savant as well, and quite a lion at all the fashionable parties. But the most important information gleaned by Edgey was the fact that for six months M. Chartier had been most attentive to one of the many Miss Woodfords; report indeed had it that they had been engaged; that they had quarrelled, and that if the rupture were not healed, the case was likely to be heard of in the Court of Session in the form of an action for breach of promise.

Edgey chuckled hugely, and had many demonstrative and goblin dances and rubbing of hands over the discovery. In a word, he said to himself he had got hold of a GOOD THING. The fact that Touser was in jail, and still in superstitious darkness regarding the flaming-faced cracksman, rather added to than diminished his sense of satisfaction. It would not do if every one were enlightened alike in this world—no one would have a chance to live then. Edgey dressed himself and oiled his Newgate knockers, and paid a visit to the French savant.

The interview could not be called a pleasant one; for each, after a few words of explanation, loudly defied the other, and threatened to call in me to settle the difficulty by locking the other up, and both as persistently failed to carry out their threat. At length, in a weak moment, and to save his reputation, and also prevent a valuable alliance with a second wealthy lady coming to a sudden conclusion, Chartier agreed to pay the black mail demanded by Edgey for his silence.

The case might have ended there had Edgey been merciful in his bleedings, but the sensation was too new and delicious for that. He bled and bled, and tormented and threatened, till the Frenchman, utterly worn out, went to Mr Woodford, and, slyly declaring that it was quite a mistake to suppose he had ever written Miss Woodford letters offering her marriage, or anything that could be construed into implying such a con-

tract, asked him how much he would take to give him a full and free quittance of any claim or lawsuit that the young lady might bring against him. It was by this time pretty clear to Mr Woodford that without the letters so disastrously lost at the house-breaking he had no case, and he hailed the offer with secret delight. The case was withdrawn from the roll; ample compensation was agreed to, a cheque for the amount being paid over to Miss Woodford, who promptly used it to pay for her marriage outfit, and was successfully linked to another man but a fortnight later. As soon as the marriage was published, the Frenchman discovered that it was he who had been done, and in his rage vowed to do for Edgey the first time he appeared. But Edgey by that time was in safer hands, for I had got from Mr Woodford an account of the skinny assistant who had been left for a moment in the bedroom, and, coupling the fact with the unfastened sash, nipped up Edgey, and had him identified before night. Edgey, making sure that he had been betrayed by the Frenchman, told the whole adventure of the flaming-faced burglar; but when Mr Woodford was called, he scouted the story as an outrageous invention, and stoutly refused to have anything to do with the case. So Edgey and Touser went to their seven years' sentence, while M. Chartier went away on his wedding-tour. Mr Woodford gave me the whole story long after, as related by the well-sucked victim, from which I learned that the flaming appearance on Chartier's face and hands was nothing but a preparation of phosphorus, with which he had covered them on entering the house with a view to frightening any servant who might have been left behind; the door being opened with a key he had got made months before from a cast taken by himself while on a visit to the house.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

ONE of the booking-clerks down at the Waverley Station was one forenoon in the act of giving change for a pound note to a gentleman booking for one of the local trains, when something peculiar about the half-sovereign he was paying out caught his eye, and made him pause to examine it. It had not the look of an ordinary counterfeit gold coin, of the kind manufactured with elaborate skill at prices varying from one-quarter to two-thirds of their current value; on the contrary, it had an old and half-worn appearance, which was even carried to the milling of the edges. Nor was it bright as a counterfeit fresh from the manufacturers, but dull in lustre, and apparently a little dirty and greasy with passing through grimy hands or pockets.

Thus far the coin would have passed a hasty scrutiny—and had already passed that of the booking-clerk—but when dashed down on the counter had no responsive musical ring to give out. It was dull and inert as a lump of lead—but a clumsy cast coated with gold.

“It’s a bad one,” said the clerk in dismay, pausing to think, undisturbed by the eager shouts of the passengers pressing and jostling at the little window. “When did I take it?—only a minute ago—I remember—that dirty customer who came first with a pound, which I couldn’t change.”

It was an awkward plight, but there was not a moment to lose. With some difficulty the lad got another to take his place at the window, and with very little hope of success ran along the platform to one of the trains just filling for a start. Eagerly peering into every compartment and into every face he passed, he at last came upon a ragged-looking man seated in a smoking compartment in the act of lighting a stumpy little clay pipe. The man had a worn and “wauf”-like look, and appeared to have all his luggage and personal effects in a knotted red cotton handkerchief lying on the seat beside him.

“Hullo, you!” cried the clerk very sharply. “You gave me a half-sovereign to change, didn’t you?”

"Yes, I did," was the astonished answer, given without any appearance of confusion.

That was enough for the clerk. He sprang into the carriage, snatched up the little bundle, seized the man by the collar, and roughly hustled him out of the carriage, making him break the clay pipe in his teeth as he did so, and then whistled out to two or three of the busy officials, who instantly surrounded and secured the prisoner beyond the possibility of escape. A policeman was soon got hold of; and to get away from the crowd which instantly collected, they hustled the man into an empty waiting-room, when he at once repeated the question he had been asking in vain from the first—

"What is it all about? what have I done?"

"Passing bad money. The half-sovereign was a bad one," said the booking-clerk.

"Are you sure?" cried the accused with a startled look, which every one present thought very cleverly assumed.

"Quite sure."

"Then I'm done!" exclaimed the prisoner, who was dressed in the torn and dirty overalls of a broken-down working man. "I'm done, for I have another;" and there and then he put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a greasy old purse, and produced another half-sovereign of the same date and make as that detected by the clerk.

"Any more of them about you?" asked the policeman, with a knowing grin, as he took possession of the coin, after demonstrating its spuriousness.

"No more; I got them from a gentleman in change for a pound just outside the rail of the booking-office," said the man, with a wonderfully calm look. "I wonder if I'll ever see him again. I canna afford to lose so much. I'm a puir man oot o' work, and dear kens when I'll win in again."

Every one grinned, and the policeman assured him he need not give himself any concern on that account, as he would in all likelihood be provided with work for some years to come.

Then, for the first time, the prisoner looked concerned and angry, and vehemently protested his innocence. When asked for his name and address, however, he hesitated, and gave but a meagre account of himself, and a name which every one present believed to be a false one.

Thus far the case seemed clear enough—an unknown tramp taken almost in the act of smashing, and likely to suffer smartly for it. But the singular feature was yet to come in.

An ordinary smasher would have been content with telling the usual pathetic story of having received the money from some one else "to hold" or keep for him; and then would have begun to speculate on the temperament of the judge who would sentence him, and on the possibility of other convictions cropping up against him to affect the length of his sentence. But this one did not drop into apathetic inaction. When he was remitted to the High Court he sent for me, and surprised me by saying—

"You get the name of not being hard on a man when he's down. I'm going to tell you all about that business with the half-sovereigns, and all about myself, if you will promise to try and catch the real criminal."

"That is what I am employed to do," I cautiously returned. "Let me hear your story, and I'll do what I can."

He then admitted that he had given a false name, that his real name was John Turnbull, and that he had been in business in a small way in Glasgow, but had "gone through it all" in a way that exasperated his creditors, from whom he had escaped—from whom, indeed, he was in hiding. Then came a repetition of the story of having got the two half-sovereigns in change for a pound outside the rail of the booking-office.

"I went forrit first to the window and offered the pound, but the clerk said 'I haven't change—go outside the rail and wait a little till I've taken some change.' I went out and waited, and waited till the hand of the clock was at train time, and I began to get feared that I would lose the train. Then, while I was asking if he could gie me change yet, a gentleman—a real swell with kid gloves and a light tweed suit on—said he could give me half-sovereigns for it; so I took it and paid for my ticket with one of them."

"How did it happen that you had exactly a pound and no more money in your possession?" I asked, concealing my incredulity as best I could.

"Because I had just got a pound sent from my eldest lassie in Glasgow that morning. I hadna a penny in the world till the order came. I couldna even afford a lodging the night before, and had to walk the streets till morning."

"The pound came by Post Office order then?"

"Yes; I got the letter at the General only an hour before I took oot my ticket."

"And signed your real name for the order?"

"Yes."

That was all I wanted to know. If he had lied, I could prove it by a call at the Money Order Office. He had not lied. The receipt and order were there, signed by him and sent by his daughter, and the sum sent was exactly what he had stated—one pound. His other statements were one by one proved to be correct, all but the alleged changing of the note, of which we had no witness. The booking-clerk remembered Turnbull coming to the window and presenting a pound for change, and also of telling him to wait a little; so his case was all but clear, and I began to try how I could best keep my part of the agreement by looking for the real criminal. I was half convinced of the man's innocence, but felt tolerably certain that if I did not get hold of another, he would suffer for the crime.

But for a singular weakness in humanity, I daresay I might soon have got a clue. That weakness is a reluctance to examine too closely the coins in one's possession. No one likes to discover that he is carrying false coin, as that implies a certain loss to himself, and, consequently, much of the base coin manufactured remains in circulation indefinitely. Some days after the remitting of Turnbull, however, a half-sovereign was brought to the Office by a victim more sharp-eyed and honest than the mass, and as this man's idea was that he had got the coin in change at one of the booking-offices on the railway, we began to believe that the real smasher was still at work in that direction. The coins were identical in make, date, and finish.

Now in one sense a half-sovereign is a bad coin to pass with profit, especially at a railway booking-office, for no very expensive ticket could be asked for, and by going repeatedly to the same windows, the smasher was likely to become known. However, the person in this case seemed to have a weakness for the railway, on account probably of the haste, and squeezing, and excitement always to be found there, and there it was that I looked for him.

The time was July, when the trains for Portobello, Musselburgh, and the other seaside resorts were running every twenty minutes or so, and generally crowded withal. There was always a great crush at the booking-office of these trains, especially on Saturday, and it sometimes happened that the window of the ticket office had to be slammed to before all were served—the remainder being coolly told to wait for the next train.

I was watching at one of these crushes, when I saw the window suddenly closed, and, glancing up, saw that it had been shut too soon by a minute and a half. A moment later the clerk came out at the door, and, catching sight of me, motioned me within to show me one of the familiar yellow coins.

"Done again, hang it!" was his excited exclamation, as I whistled out over the sham half-sovereign.

"Who passed it?—did you notice?" I quickly asked.

"I didn't notice—I was too hurried, with every one shouting at the window," was the chagrined reply. "Did you not notice any one?"

I thought for a moment, and then said—

"Was it not that tall, gentlemanly young fellow in light tweeds? Yet he had not the look of a smasher."

"I believe it was a man at least. You might take a walk round the station and see if you can recognise him."

I did as he advised, and after a stroll round at last found a young and remarkably good-looking gentleman seated comfortably in a first-class carriage going to Portobello. He had a fast look, and was evidently haughtily aristocratic; but I was quite sure that he was the same who but a few minutes before had bought a third-class ticket; so, after thinking for a moment, I retired and prompted one of the men on the platform to go and ask him to show his ticket. The man came back in a moment—

"Says he got a third-class ticket in mistake, and will pay the difference at Portobello," was the message he brought back; whereupon I conceived a longing for Portobello as irresistible as it was in the happy boyhood days when I had to trudge to it in the broiling sun on barefoot. Accordingly I got into the carriage along with my genteel acquaintance, and tried to draw him into conversation. At first he was both haughty and shy, but he thawed by degrees, and then, to my surprise, he incidentally mentioned that he was the son of a gentleman of high standing in the city whom I knew perfectly, and who was wealthy enough to keep both a town and a country house. There was such a striking similarity in his features to those of the gentleman he named, that I had not the slightest doubt of the truth of the statement, which made my hopes of a capture sink suddenly to zero.

"What an ass I have been to come away on this slight clue!" was my exasperated thought as we neared Portobello. "Com-

ing down here, while the real smasher is doubtless laughing at me up yonder!"

The secret of my movement in that direction of course was that the description given by Turnbull tallied pretty closely with that of the man before me; but the more I talked with my companion the less hopeful I became.

I parted with him at Portobello, and was so out of temper with myself that I did not even leave the station; I merely waited till the train was gone, and then turned to the booking-office to ask a ticket for Edinburgh. There was a considerable crowd already there and being served, and I had to wait my turn. What was my surprise, then, to notice that the second man before me in the slowly moving file of ticket-seekers was my new acquaintance in light tweeds, Mr Albert Milne!

"Strange that he too should return by the very first train?" I thought, and then he was before the window, and I heard him say, "Edinburgh—First-Class." With something approaching to rudeness, I crushed forward over the intending passenger as he laid down a coin in payment; saw that the coin was yellow, and representing a half-sovereign; and with a sudden remorseless push and jostle I struggled past the person before me, and grabbed at coin and gentleman at the same moment.

There was a commotion at once; and Mr Milne turned upon me with a look of surprise and indignation which made me fervently hope that I was not making a mistake.

"Well? What is the matter?" he asked, without trying to disengage himself.

My answer was to examine the coin closely. It was of the same make, date, and appearance as those already in our hands. I drew a long breath of relief, and said sternly—

"You are trying to pass a bad half-sovereign. It's a mere bit of tin or lead gilt over—see!" and I doubled it between my finger and thumb.

"Is it? Well, that's not surprising—there's a deal of that floating about just now," and he quietly thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out a half-crown, which he tossed down. "That is not bad, surely?"

I nodded to the ticket clerk to give him the ticket and change, after I had looked at the coin; and while he was picking it up I quietly snapped a handcuff on his wrist. Then he started round with a tug that nearly dislocated my own wrist, and with blazing eyes and a baited look which would have

frightened many, but which were only pleasing to me, revealing as they did the fact that his former calmness had been assumed.

"How dare you, you scoundrel!" he shouted. "Unfasten that thing, or I'll throttle you where you stand!"

I did not obey, but merely whistled to one of the county police in attendance. He did not throttle me either, seeing the man lent me his truncheon in a moment, but he still struggled a little, and then cried out—

"What authority have you to treat a gentleman thus?"

I put my disengaged hand into my waistcoat-pocket, and produced my silver-crowned staff of authority, and at the same moment some one in the crowd uttered the words—"It's M'Govan—it's Jamie M'Govan," and my prisoner became quieter in an instant.

"But—but, my dear sir, this is most preposterous," he said, as soon as he could speak, and with an attempt at a smile. "I hope you don't imagine for a moment that I am responsible for the coin being bad?"

I had no opinion to offer; and he went on pleading, and protesting, and enumerating his position and wealthy connections, till the Portobello Police Station was reached.

We searched him there to the very boots and stockings, but found no base money in his possession, when he again renewed his protestations, and demanded to be set free, or for us to telegraph to his father, or do anything to save him the disgrace of entering Edinburgh a manacled prisoner. He threatened us, too, with the direst reprisals that the law could inflict, but it was all mere wasted talk. His very energy and excitement convinced me of his guilt. An innocent man would have been quiet and even jocular.

The only puzzling thing was how a gentleman of means should be engaged in such a daring crime. Another thing gave me some concern—namely, how we were to bring the crime home to him. I was keenly disappointed in finding no base money in his possession. Had he been a professional smasher I should not have been a bit astonished, as they are only too careful in that respect; but with a clumsy amateur, who evidently made his own "sinker" as well as passed it, it was surprising. By speaking to the guard, I was allowed a separate compartment of a first-class carriage to convey him to Edinburgh. He appeared very dejected and all but ferocious in his demeanour; so silent did he become latterly, that I

began to wish myself and him safe within the Lock-up walls, almost sure that he meditated something desperate. When we approached Edinburgh he was still sullen; but though we had to pass through the Calton tunnel I had no fear of him trying to escape, as his wrist was fastened securely to my own. I cannot say that I was conscious of any movement while we were in the profound darkness, but the moment we emerged into the light I noticed that his boots were off.

"Hullo! were you thinking of making a jump for it?" I asked, picking up one of the boots and looking about for the other.

"Yes, and I should have made it too, if we'd been a moment longer in the tunnel," he answered, with apparent recklessness.

"Where's the other boot?" I asked, after trying to show that such a jump would have been almost certain death.

"Look for it," was the surly reply; and, rather nettled, I made him put on the one, saying coolly—

"You've thrown it out, but that's nothing to me. I'll get it again. Only I thought you might like to have two boots on when *walking to the Office*."

"I won't walk. Good God, it would kill me! I can pay for a cab," he frantically returned; but to show him that two could play at cross purposes, I insisted on my point, and he had to walk, hand-cuffed to me, with his one boot off, a policeman on the other side, and a great shouting and jeering crowd in his wake. The booking-clerk at the station had already failed to identify him in any way, and my sole hope now lay in the prisoner Turnbull. As soon as we reached the Office I had a number of men in plain clothes ranged in line, and Mr Albert Milne placed among them. Then Turnbull was brought in, but he picked out the wrong man, evidently because we had put on him a suit of light tweeds like that of Milne. The fact is, I believe that Turnbull had not taken much notice of the man's face at the station, little dreaming that such a case would spring from it. Again I was disappointed, and I tried strenuously to discover where Milne lived, but all in vain. He wrote out an urgent appeal to his father to help him out of an absurd charge of passing bad money; but this appeal, though I took the trouble to deliver it in person, brought no response. The note was taken from me by a stately footman, but in a short time he brought it back, with the stiff intimation that—"There was no answer." I was so dumbfounded that I put one or two questions to the man, from which I discovered that Albert

Milne was the prodigal son of the family, and had long since been cast off and disowned by all his relatives. The man could not say how he lived or existed; believed he had money of some kind, if it wasn't all spent, but couldn't say anything about it. In short, he plainly hinted that my questions were not agreeable, and showed me to the door. After much hunting and ferreting I did at last discover his lodging, but only to be told that the place had been visited a day or two before by a "young lady, very sad-looking and concerned," who had paid all the debts due there by Milne, and taken away all his curious "tools and things." Again I was nearly crazed with chagrin and disappointment, and I actually began to fear that the failures could have but one ending—the release of the guilty man. As a last faint hope I had the Calton tunnel searched for the missing boot, but it could not be found.

A day or two later I was called upon by a young girl—she did not look above twenty, she was so sweet-faced and gentle in her manner, though I understand she was a year or two older. She was plainly dressed, and frankly told me that she was engaged as governess with a family in town.

"My name is Catherine Spence," she said, after a painful pause, during which she blushed painfully, and appeared greatly agitated. "I am a friend of Mr Milne, who has been arrested on a charge of passing bad money—indeed, we were once—once engaged to be married;" and then she gave way and cried bitterly for some minutes. "They have all turned against him but me," she said, after the fit was over, "but I know him better than any one; if he had only been kindly treated he would never have gone wrong. He may be weak and foolish in some things, but he is a noble fellow at heart."

"But they say that he robbed his own father," I gravely remarked.

"That is only the cruel way they put it," she eagerly returned. "The money was actually his own portion which his father was keeping back."

"That may be; but I have been told also that he was dastardly enough to engage himself to marry a wealthy young lady, and the moment he got all her money settled on himself, squandered it, and never married her after all."

"That was myself," sadly returned the generous young girl; "but he was hard pressed with bills of money lenders, who threatened him awfully the moment the money was his."

"And he made you poor?" I said, looking into her beautiful

face with an irrepressible thrill of emotion. "He took from you your all, and yet you defend him?"

"I love him," she simply responded. "I gave him my heart four long years ago, and it will be his as long as God lets it beat. If I could lay it under his head to make him comfortable, I would do it now."

Something like the moisture in her eyes crept into my own. I was effectually silenced, but I could not help pitying the poor girl in her unswerving devotion to one who at every turn in my inquiries seemed revealed in a baser light.

"I admire your spirit," I said at length, "but I'm sorry to see such love thrown away on a scoundrel."

"That's because to you he seems a criminal only; to me he is the foundation of my life—all I build my hopes upon."

"Your hopes?" I echoed, with ill-concealed surprise. "Is it possible you have still hope of him?"

"God has given me it; and I do not believe He gave it to mock me," she said, with clasped hands. "I am certain Albert will rise to a nobler life yet; if he is only not crushed now—now when he is so young and impressionable. That has brought me here. I do not come to bribe you. Oh, Mr McGovan, I know something of your skill, and I know also that you would spurn such an offer. But if you are strong—if God has given you great skill in searching out evidence and doing your duty—surely He has given you also a merciful heart. Will you be merciful for once? Will you not press your advantage too hard? Will you give him some chance to escape the actual brand of a felon?"

In giving an outline of the devoted girl's words, I can convey but a faint impression of her moving eloquence. It is very easy looking back on such a scene to say "Pooh, pooh! mercy? the thing is absurd;" but at the moment it made a sore tug at my heart. I could make no promise of the kind, but I actually did show mercy in a way. I had little doubt, after I had got rid of my visitor, that she and the young lady who had visited Milne's lodging and removed all his rude coining implements were one person. I could have easily ferreted out the truth, and possibly have forced her into the witness-box against her lover; but I held back the suspicion as a last resource. A skilled agent was sent in to conduct Milne's case, and he battled me hard on the subject of a remand, saying that I had no evidence whatever against the "gentleman," and stoutly demanding his release, on bail at least. I, however, assured

the Sheriff that I had the very best of evidence of the guilt of the accused, but that it was not yet presentable, and my word carried the day. I alluded to what I thought was a trump card—namely, the removal of the crinating implements from his lodgings; but, as chance had it, and as I had fondly trusted, that card was never needed.

The day after his remand, another of the bad half-sovereigns was brought to the Office by a provision dealer in the Canon-gate, and this man gave the name and address of the people he had got it from, at the same time saying that “they were worth looking after.”

I went to the house indicated, and found in it, in possession of the woman, ten counterfeit half-sovereigns of the same make and date. On questioning the woman as to where they came from, she was at first sullen and secretive, but when I ordered her to pack up and come with me, she admitted that her “man” was a platelayer in the Calton tunnel, and that he had found them in a boot which he had picked up on the sideway. I got her to produce the boot, when she at once turned out a cork sole which was inside, on the under side of which had been cut a dozen round holes exactly the size of half-a-sovereign—into which, indeed, the coins fitted tightly and neatly, leaving not a trace of their presence when the sole was inserted in the boot. The boot, as may be expected, on being compared with that of Milne, was found to be its fellow—though the other cork sole was sound and intact. The last link in the evidence was now supplied, and as Turnbull now swore most positively to Milne as the man who gave him the two coins in exchange for his pound, we had a clear case for the jury.

The charge of coining was never gone into, but that of “uttering” was clearly established, and the position and education of the prisoner, far from being a help to him at his trial, were heavily against him. After a severe reprimand from the presiding Judge, he was sentenced to seven years’ penal servitude.

Even then Catherine Spence leant over the dock and clasped him with both hands—not weeping, as I had expected, but looking as bright and cheering as an angel from heaven—till he was drawn from her and hurried out of sight, when she dropped like a log and was carried out insensible.

And thus during the whole of his incarceration she continued, bright, cheering, and loving; doing her duty to all

around her; carefully saving every penny of her salary not actually needed to clothe her, and regularly forwarding to him at the proper intervals, not a letter, but a complete diary of her thoughts and feelings every day of her life. The perusal of this reflex of her life, the Governor has assured me, would have melted a heart of stone. Milne's heart, though depraved enough, was not exactly stone; and about the third year, the devotion of this angelic woman began to produce some effect on his mind and life. His whole conduct, demeanour, and thoughts became changed; the bitter tone vanished like magic from his letters; and he now declared that the greatest blessing of his life had been his capture and imprisonment, as they alone had revealed to him this loving girl's true worth.

I fully expected that all this would change when he was set free, but I was mistaken. When nearly six years were gone he was liberated. Catherine Spence was at the prison-gate to receive him, to put her arms about his neck and kiss the stain of crime from his brow. They were married, and with her little savings left the country together. If I told how nobly he has redeemed his character in the new country, I should only reveal an identity I am anxious to conceal. He will never return to this country, but has long since been fully reconciled to his father and friends; and his whole redemption he owes to a woman's love.

BORN TO CRIME.

MR BARCLAY was one of those who think that crime is to be rooted out by plunging boldly into its haunts and distributing tracts, with here and there a word of advice and warning, or timely assistance in distress. He was a quiet, good man, of a subdued religious tendency, who spent a deal of time and money in this way, and, if he accomplished little good, he at least did no harm. Real criminals only laughed at him as a harmless "gospel grinder," or violently slammed the door in his face, lighting their pipes with the tracts he thrust underneath. Indeed, to apply such an influence to criminals, as I always insisted to him, is like trying to soothe a raging tooth with laudanum when the decayed and pestiferous stump calls for the dentist's forceps as the only remedy.

Poor Mr Barclay! I believe that to the end he thought me slightly irreverent because I smiled at most of his efforts, but, to show that he was mistaken, I shall here give a curious case which proves that all his efforts were not made in vain.

About ten o'clock at night, Mr Barclay was moving up a narrow close leading to North College Street—the same in which was the den of our esteemed acquaintance, Mr William Pike, noticed in a previous sketch (p. 267)—having been detained to that hour at the bedside of a dying woman.

Mr Barclay was in a meditative mood, and moved up the close but slowly, with his hands clasped behind him on the Bible he had been using, and his eyes half closed, when he was suddenly aroused by a ferocious blow in the stomach, and a tug at his watch chain. The blow took his breath away, and sent him staggering back against the nearest wall, and by the time he looked round the assailant had dashed down the close and vanished. Then he discovered that his watch and chain—both valuable gold ones—were gone. There was only one lamp near the spot, and by its dim light he had been just able to decide that his assailant was a powerful and lithe-bodied fellow of middle age. Not another soul was in sight, and, strange to say, after the first shock was over, Mr Barclay was glad of the fact.

"How fortunate that I was not garroted and my purse taken as well!" was his first reflection. "The man is a stranger, too, I'm certain, or he would never have robbed me. They may laugh at me, and annoy me, but they would never rob me. On the whole, though the watch and chain are gone, I have much to be thankful for. It was wrong of me to put such a temptation in their way."

Nothing here, it will be seen, of an intention to inform the police of the robbery, and have the stolen goods traced, if possible. Not only had he peculiar views against going to law, but, secretly, he dreaded being laughed at for getting into a scrape against which we had often warned him.

"M'Govan might get me the watch and chain, but he would get me the thief too, and perhaps force me to rivet a convict's chain upon him for life," was his thought as he hurried up the close to get out of the dangerous quarter. "If I sent but one of the misguided beings to prison, it would weaken my hold upon them ever after. I will bear it in silence."

North College Street at that time was quite a narrow street, having little traffic in it, and was a good deal infested by swarms of ragamuffins from the closes below, to say nothing of pests of older growth. When Mr Barclay emerged into it from the narrow and steep close in which he had been robbed, he came full upon a group of these gutter waifs deeply absorbed in a game of pitch and toss on the smooth macadamised road. They had taken advantage of the light of the nearest lamp, and had their "pitch" right across the road. Just as Mr Barclay paused, they were clustered in the centre of the road wrangling fiercely over some dispute in the game, and swearing quite as volubly as if they had been men instead of children. Mr Barclay had fully resolved to pause and rebuke the juvenile profanity, when a flying cab, turning the corner at a terrific pace, took the task out of his hands by crashing down on the fierce group, and scattering them without warning. All the boys but one managed to wriggle aside, but this exception slipped his foot and was among the horses' feet in an instant.

Some persons seeing an accident of this kind instinctively jump back and hold their breath, or avert their heads; others fly forward, and before they know anything are into the thick of the danger in an attempt to save. Quiet and subdued though he was in general, Mr Barclay was of this nature, and the boy was scarcely down when the hand of the gentleman was on him. The horses' hoofs, in a wild splatter, rained blows

about them both, as it was reared up on its haunches by the terror-stricken driver, but the wheels were checked in time, and, though both were bleeding and bruised, the boy's life was saved.

Mr Barclay was helped to the side with the boy hanging limp and senseless in his arms, and then the Infirmary close by was naturally suggested for both. Though hurt himself, Mr Barclay would not relinquish his charge, but carried the boy across the Bridge and down to the Surgical Hospital himself, and not till the dirty little fellow's broken arm had been set, and his bleeding head bound up, did he even hint at his own injuries. These were chiefly bruises and bumps; and after a close examination of his swollen hand, the doctor was able to decide that no bones were broken, and that the brave old man might go home in a cab.

The boy rescued looked almost an old man in features, but he was in reality only eight. His name, he said, was Billy Gouger, and he had no particular home—just where his father took him. Billy was grateful, in a way, for being saved so promptly, and expressed the feeling in a queer fashion. When Mr Barclay promised to come and see him next day, he warmly clasped the proffered hand in his uninjured paw, and said generously—

“I'll stand you reading bibles, or tracts, or anything to me, sir—I'll stand anything from you, though it's ever so bad.”

Mr Barclay went home more sad and depressed about the boy's condition than about either of their bodily injuries. There was a manifest cunning and reticence about the child's answers which pointed but too clearly to one inference—his father was a professional criminal, and the less that was said about him and his doings the better for the boy's safety and wellbeing. Billy would grow up to the same life, and the life Mr Barclay had thus saved would be devoted to every phase of rascality that was likely to pay—the very hand which was clasping his own in transient gratitude might yet be raised to take his life. He was not so sure, after all, if he had done a good action in saving the boy.

Thinking, however, did not improve the matter; but next morning, true to his promise, he called at the Infirmary, and found Billy as well as could be expected, and likely to be allowed out of the place in a few days, though his broken arm would take a week or two to mend. With uncommon tact the old man produced neither Bible nor tracts, but instead talked

long and kindly to the urchin about the life he led and the future before him, all of which Billy endured with praiseworthy patience. But when the proposal came to go into the Industrial School and be made an honest man of, Billy struck out most stoutly. He couldn't and wouldn't go against his father's wishes; his father would kill him if he tried it; and he didn't want to be killed.

Just then the father, in the person of Sam Gouger, appeared at the bedside. He had heard only that morning of the accident, and had run all the way in great excitement to the Infirmary, as the version of the story he had received was that the boy was dying. The moment matters were explained to him at the bedside by the nurse of the ward, he drew a long breath of relief, wiped the sweat from his brow, and said to his son—

"You young villain, wait till you're better, and I'll break every bone in your body!"

Then he noticed for the first time the gentleman who had saved his son's life, and was about to frame a few words of thanks, when he was observed by Mr Barclay to start violently, and suddenly become dumb, with his eyes almost jumping from their sockets as they remained chained to that gentleman's mild and pleasing features.

"Well, I'm d—d! I didn't look for this!" he at length managed to blurt out in a hoarse and half-choked whisper.

"We have met before, I daresay," said Mr Barclay, with a kindly smile and nod. "Perhaps you've seen me visiting about some of the closes?"

"Oh, don't mention it," slowly gasped Gouger, with a violent effort. "It ain't worth while speakin' of it. I—I thought I'd see another kind of cove altogether. I'm very much obliged to you for saving the boy's life, though; may I be blanked into the blankest blank if I'm not—there!" And while he uttered these words in a fearfully earnest tone, he seized the hand of the gentleman and wrung it till it ached. "Ye see I like the little varmint—it's nateral I should, seeing he's the only one I've got, and there! I'm sorry—blanked sorry—I mean glad—blow me if I know what I'm saying! Well, I deserve seven years for it—I'm blanked if I don't!"

"I'm sure you're heartily welcome to the little service I was enabled to render," responded Mr Barclay; "but in reality you owe it more to an accident which detained me a little longer in the close than I had expected. I was assaulted and robbed a moment or two before."

"Imphm—yes—I think I know something about that," said Gouger, in abject confusion and shame. "And the man that did it deserves to be burned alive—scarified with a red-hot poker—that's about it!"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in kindly demur. "I've no doubt he'll reproach himself for it some day; but it shows us how an apparent misfortune sometimes turns out a great blessing."

"A great—a very great blessing," echoed Gouger, with a painful gasp, as if each word choked him. "And you lost something, I daresay—a watch, maybe, and a chain?"

"I did, indeed; but I don't regret the loss now——"

"Well, I'll try to get them back for you," said Sam Gouger, with remarkable firmness and determination. "Mind, I don't say I'll manage it, 'cause that unnatural brute that did it,"—and he doubled up his fists and hit himself violently on the breast, for want of a better mark, as it seemed—"that villain would most likely take them straight to a fence, and get so much for them. Then, most likely, all he got, or nearly all, will be spent by this time; and how the dickens is he to get it back without money!"

"I purposely refrained from informing the police of the loss, for fear I might have to appear as witness against the thief, and perhaps be the means of imprisoning him for life," said Mr Barclay, in explanation; and he then went on to explain the nature of his work among the lapsed classes, all of which made Gouger groan aloud, as if suddenly smitten with contrition for the wickedness of the class to which he belonged.

"Influence be blowed!" he said, with energy. "I'd have set M'Govan after the villain the very minute I was robbed. What a softy you are, to be sure! and he gave you a punch in the stomick, too! Well, I hope that watch and chain'll burn into him night and day till you gets them back again."

After expressing himself in many such forcible speeches as these, Sam Gouger shook Mr Barclay by the hand and took his departure, still squaring out at an imaginary thief as he went, and always turning the blows in upon his own breast. As soon as he was outside the Infirmary gate, he walked slowly and meditatively up to a high land of houses in the Lawnmarket, and presented himself at the business premises of a fence called David Binnie.

"Sent that watch and chain away yet, Dave?" he inquiringly began.

Now Dave was a man of caution, and never committed himself in any answer he made.

"Why?"

"'Cause I want you to let's have them back again, and I'll make it up to you in some other way, seeing as the money's all done," said Gouger. "I find I took them—by mistake—from a kind cove that goes about doin' good, and who saved little Billy's life not ten minutes after."

"That's too thin," said Dave sharply. "I wonder you'd try them tricks on an old hand like me. If the old cove's so good, let him stump up ten pounds for the two, and it's a bargain. I don't say I have them still by me, but I can get them, I dare-say, if the money's brought."

"I couldn't ask him—I'd sooner set M'Govan on to you and your little doings, and stand seven years for it myself," said Gouger, with a calmness that alarmed the fence. "I'd be a brute if I let *him* lose by it—but you? You're able to stand a little loss out of what you've made off me. So speak fair and do the best you can, or I'm blowed if you don't go to prison wi' me!"

"I'm not afraid of you," defiantly returned the fence. "It won't be seven, but fourteen years you'll get, first time your nabbed, mind that! Fourteen years?" he meditatively added, with deep cunning, as if pondering the position for the first time. "Why, you'll be quite an old man when you come out again."

This delicate allusion had the effect of silencing Gouger. He knew what prison was, for he had spent exactly two-thirds of his life in it, and, despite its comforts, its regular meals, wholesome regimen, and comfortable beds, he loathed it with all his strength, and would have fought like a tiger to preserve his liberty. But though his tongue was stopped, his thoughts were not. He was not an ordinary criminal, inasmuch as he had some education, and could read, and write, and cipher with remarkable skill, as many a charitably-disposed person, to whom his moving appeals were addressed, had found to their cost. In a kind of sense of honour he felt bound to restore the watch and chain as he had promised—at least to make every possible effort to do so. Under ordinary circumstances, he might have risked another robbery and released the articles by the proceeds, but Gouger had been threatened by a miserable and greedy fence, and therefore Gouger was angry and exasperated.

He left the house of the fence pondering deeply the position,

and, after slowly traversing a street or two, suddenly exclaimed to himself—

“I’ll do it—I’ll do it !”

He proceeded to execute his plan with great coolness and deliberation. His first step was to get hold of a needy acquaintance, whom he primed well with drink and promises, and in the evening this man appeared at the den of the fence, and on some pretext induced him to adjourn for a few minutes to a drinking den further down the street, where a glass of strong raw whisky, well drugged with laudanum, soon laid him asleep on the bench. Gouger, who was watching the whole proceeding unseen, no sooner saw him doze off into slumber, than he went to the nearest green and stole a clothes rope, upon which I wouldn’t have risked my life for a world of solid silver. He then proceeded to the Lawnmarket, and carefully took the bearings of the fence’s home from below. The two rooms were one storey from the top of the high land, and a crazy chimney stack graced the roof not far from the line of the windows.

“If I’m nabbed I can’t get no more than I would get if I peached on Dave,” was Gouger’s mode of reasoning; “but this way I’ve a chance both to get the things and get off scot free, for he’ll never be such a fool as to kick up a rumpus about it. It wouldn’t be good for his health, and, besides, I’m not to be taken easily this time.”

Up to the top of the likeliest stair went Gouger, and, as burglaries were not frequent in that quarter, he had no difficulty in getting on to the roof by a loosely secured hatch. Then he sat down on the slates and unwound the rope from his body, fastening one end securely to the chimney stack, and allowing the other to droop over the edge of the roof. A slater or plumber could not have been more cool or easy in a task of the kind. Gouger did not even fasten the rope round his waist, in case of his hands slipping, but quietly slid over the edge of the building, and in a moment was hanging by the hands eight or nine storeys from the ground. He had but a short distance to descend, but the moment his feet touched the sill of Dave’s window he gave a curse, and stood still in dismay. There was no light within but that of the fire, but near this he saw, reclining asleep, a man whom he knew too well as the brother of the fence.

“Blast my stupidity, if I haven’t bungled the job after all!” he exclaimed, with teeth set in ferocious excitement and chagrin. “He’s left Pate to watch while he was away, and

the moment I touch the window he'll up and holler for help. Well, I can't go back now—it's got to be done, *even though I've to croak him;*" and he very quietly got out his long-bladed clasp knife, opened it, and placed it crosswise in his mouth, while he gently raised the sash of the window, with his eyes fixed intently upon the sleeping man. The moment the window was raised, a current of cold air rushed in on the face of the sleeping man, and he opened his eyes and started up just as Gouger sprang in and pinned him with his strong hands. There was no shouting on either side—only a sharp exclamation and a string of subdued curses as they grappled together, and rolled over and over on the floor. The danger Gouger had run on entering the place had given the adventure a spice of interest to him, but it had also roused that desperate excitement which yearly sends a house-breaker or two to the gallows as red-handed murderers.

Gouger was a powerful fellow, who, when he chose to exert himself in prison, took six warders to master him. The brother of the fence, on the other hand, was a mere drunken loafer, with muscles soft as putty, and no more strength than a tom cat. After a fierce wriggle or two Gouger struggled upmost, and pinning the wriggling wretch to the floor with one hand, quickly took from his teeth the long knife, and pressed its point down on the region of the other's heart.

"Dave has set you to watch his hide, and I'm come to take two things out of it—two things, mark you, and no more," he fiercely whispered in the man's ear. "Is it to be a croaking business or not? Whichever you like—it's all the same to me—but I must have the gospel grinder's watch and chain."

"I'll give in—take what you like," stuttered the prostrate man; and Gouger at once put his willingness to the test by turning him over on his face and tying his wrists together with strong twine—much more secure and painful to bear than rope.

He then performed the same operation on the man's ankles, and afterwards generously helped him to the chair he had vacated on being awakened. The hide of the fence was in the floor, and Gouger coolly inserted the point of his knife in the board covering it, and laid bare the interesting collection of valuables and tools. More than one watch was there keeping that of Mr Barclay company, secure of not visiting the melting-pot beside which they reposed, and only waiting a fitting opportunity for visiting some distant city. Gouger could

have taken the whole as easily as the single watch and broken chain, and one would imagine he might as well have done so as commit another robbery a day or two later at some other place. But he had ideas of his own, and took the articles he had come for and no more.

"Tell Dave it was Sam Gouger that took them, and that he doesn't mean to pay for them, and that he thinks Dave should send M'Govan after him," were his parting words to the bound guardian of the hide; and then he unbarred and unlocked the door and vanished, leaving the rope still dangling from the chimney-stack above. He had to go to the Infirmary to get Mr Barclay's address, so it was past midnight when he arrived at that gentleman's house, and considerably astonished the household by saying that he must see him. When he did appear, that gentleman was astonished to see his rough-looking visitor produce from his pocket the gold watch and chain so violently wrenched from him a night or two before.

"I thought I could get it, if I tried desperate hard," said Gouger lightly, "and I managed it, though it was a tougher job than I looked for. I was near croaking a fellow, but, luckily for him, he gave in, and I've brought them to you safe and sound, except a break in the chain, which you'll get put right for twopence or threepence."

Mr Barclay received his treasured watch and gazed at the strange visitor with a full heart; and scarcely knowing whether to smile or cry.

"You are a noble fellow," he said at last, wringing Gouger's hand with impulsive warmth. "Look you, Gouger—you're fit for better things than a mere prowling vagabond and thief, liable to be seized at any moment. Say the word and I'll get you work—a good post—a position of respectability and trust with friends of my own, in a place where no one could possibly know anything of your past life. It is a shame that the world should be robbed of such energy and manliness!"

The man was moved—possibly more deeply than he cared to show, for he did not speak for a moment or two, and when he did, his voice was thick and hoarse with emotion; but his answer was none the less firm and prompt.

"I thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart, for the offer. It is the first time such kindness has been shown me," he said, in a tone so strangely softened that he seemed for the time a different man; "but I cannot accept it—I *dare not*. Think what I am, and have been. My father, my grandfather, my

mother, her mother, my sisters and brothers—all my relatives have been professional thieves. We were trained to it from infancy; we have known no other life—thieving and robbery are part of my being, as much as my bones and flesh. I could not shake it off now. I would only disgrace you, and show the most atrocious ingratitude in return for your kindness. *I could not be honest though I would.*”

Protests and reasoning on the part of Mr Barclay were alike useless. Gouger heard them all respectfully, but firmly repeated his answer, and left the house. The next time Mr Barclay saw him he was in prison.

Dave Binnie, the fence, was furious when he returned to his place in the morning and got news of the daring robbery by Gouger. He could not safely denounce Gouger for that, but he happened to know the particulars of another robbery in which Gouger had taken a leading part, and these he lost no time in placing before me. I picked up Gouger in the Infirmary, to which he had gone with a jelly-cake to his boy; and, contrary to his usual practice, he made no resistance, and the four men I had taken with me were not required. Indeed, Gouger seemed strangely quiet and subdued, though he promptly denounced Dave, and revealed all the particulars of the case as I have put them down. The consequence was that, though Dave had carefully emptied his hide, and nailed the board firmly in its place in the floor, I found enough evidence in the place to justify me in detaining him. Much to my delight, Gouger was accepted as evidence against the fence, who got five years for his share in the affair. As for Gouger, he was not benefited in the least, for he was still “wanted” for the other affair, and had, besides, to serve out part of a previous sentence, making his sentence equal to nearly fourteen years’ penal. Before he was transferred to the Penitentiary he sent for Mr Barclay, and after warmly thanking him for the interest he had shown in him, referred to the boy Billy.

“I meant him for a thief, and had no doubt I’d make him a good one,” he said; “but, somehow, your words have got into my head, and I think, on the whole, it’s not a paying trick. I think, too, that Billy’s sharp enough for something better, on the square. I’m too old to change, but maybe you’d be good enough to try your hand on him. Whatever I say he’s to do he’ll go in for; so you’d find him willing enough.”

The result of this was that Billy, with his arm in a sling, was brought to see his father, and get the command from his own lips that henceforth he was to alter his life and go "on the square."

"You'll maybe never see me again, Billy," said the father, as he concluded, "and if I live out my sentence you'll be in a different line, all nicely togged out and respectable, so you must take no notice of me, but just pass me on the street same as I was dirt."

"I won't, I'm blowed if I will!" howled Billy, with a torrent of tears.

"I say you shall; and my word's law," sternly returned the father, with a ferocious look that quite altered the expression of his face, and Billy was cowed at once, and promised implicit obedience. He went into the Industrial School the day after; and he conducted himself well, and steadily rose till he became a missionary in one of the worst parts of London, where, curious to relate, his greatest hold on the lawless people among whom he labours has been acquired by him boldly admitting that he is the son of a thief. Gouger died in prison before his sentence expired; but his last message to Billy was—"Keep on the square, Billy—keep on the square."

A HOUSE WITH CRIMSON BLINDS.

It was in passing along a street close to Coates Crescent, about two o'clock in the morning, that I first noticed the house with crimson blinds particularly. I had seen it before, occupied by different tenants, and occasionally with the blinds down, and ticketed "To Let Furnished;" but upon this occasion it chanced to be the only house in a whole street with lighted windows, and I instinctively paused before it, wondering a little at finding no waifs with rouged cheeks and sham smiles floating near it. A gay house it evidently was, for there were on the porch several gentlemen smoking cigars somewhat excitedly, but not a flutter of a ribbon or trace of a woman could I see near the place. This is not usual at ordinary respectable parties, and my resolve was to note the place and study its character at a future time. I had absolutely no expectation that anything would come of my curiosity, and mention the circumstance, not to imply any particular acuteness on my part, but merely because it is the beginning of the case.

A night or two after, I passed the house at a late hour and saw the same peculiarity—the blinds down, every window lit, and young gentlemen either at the porch or passing hastily in, and I began to form the opinion that it was a shebeen, which would be cunningly protected from the clutches of the law by some grandiloquent name of club or society.

I was in the neighbourhood one morning shortly after, and turned into the street to have a look at the place by day. The hour was late, about eleven in the forenoon—yet the blinds were still down—with a difference. At one window, standing between the blind and the cold panes was a little girl of some three years, with curly yellow hair, leaning her brow on the glass, and quietly weeping in her loneliness. To my mind weeping and crying are two very different things—the first being noiseless and the second all outcry. Happily, such grief is not often put upon childhood, and the very oddity of the circumstances made me stand and stare at the worn face

and tear-blinded eyes of the child. No one was near her—no one appeared to be stirring in the great house but herself, or to have struck her or injured her; yet there she was, looking wearily out on vacancy and weeping without restraint.

"A gay house, with one young heart unhappy within its walls," was my mental comment. "I wonder what is the history of the occupants."

While I stood looking, confident that the child, though looking straight forward, saw nothing of me—a hand, masculine and gentlemanly looking, with some gold rings on the fingers, came in on the golden head sharply, tugged it ruthlessly in by the hair, and I saw the child no more. Yet the picture lingered with me; and in the hurry scurry of other matters, I found my mind often running back to the young face, so old in grief and care, and the taper fingers and iron grasp which had so swiftly tugged it from my sight. But even that was rubbed out shortly, and I soon ceased to think of either house or occupants.

A month or so later, I was one forenoon introduced at the Central Office to a gentleman who refused to state his case fully to any one but the detective to whose care it was likely to be entrusted. As soon as we were alone, he placed an ordinary draper's "Bought of," bearing a Glasgow address, and the name "George Blake and Company," before me, saying with curious abruptness and some excitement—

"That is my name, and was my address, and I am just out of prison."

"Out of prison?" I echoed with some surprise. "I understood that you wished to enter a charge of robbery."

"And a jail bird, you think, cannot be robbed?" he said, with a sharp bitterness and increasing excitement. "The taint is on me, you suppose, and I can have no feelings, no wrongs, no injustice which call for your aid. Wait till you hear my story, and you will alter your tone."

"You are hasty; but, pray, proceed," I quietly answered, and might have said more, but there he fiercely took me up.

"Yes, hasty—that is the word for it," he hurriedly interposed. "That means passionate—soft—gullible—a fool, in fact. My wife—curse her, soul and body!—knew that, and played upon it, and here I am—a ruined, tainted man."

"Was it she who robbed you?" I ventured to inquire.

"Ay, it was she; but I could have forgiven that, had she not done worse," he answered, with his features twitching with the

effort to keep back tears. "When I married her four years ago there wasn't a happier or more prosperous man in Glasgow. She was pretty, came of a good family, and seemed a very angel to me, while I had a good business and a capital of about £2000 clear cash. It was too good to last. I found, after a year or two, that she was vain as a peacock about her looks; would have emptied my shop with her insatiable desire for showy dresses and head-gear; and, what was worse, began to tipple slyly, under a plea that her health was poor and that the doctor had ordered her stimulants."

"Ah, I can guess what is coming now," I said, as his hot breathed words were choked off in another anguished spasm.

"You can't!" he violently answered. "It is worse than anything you can guess at for dastardly and cold-blooded cruelty. I thought that when she became a mother, her vanity would sober down a little, but she made as sorry a mother as she was a wife, leaving the child entirely to the care of servants, and gadding about everywhere—visiting theatres, attending parties, and even, I suspect, going to dancings and balls of which I knew nothing. I reasoned with her, checked her, restricted her by refusing to be responsible for her debts, but all in vain. They say there's an unsound sheep in every flock—I had by evil luck picked the faulty one of the family. One day a vague whisper roused me to action, and I watched her after she had left the house to me and my little girl; saw her with my own eyes go and meet a handsome-looking villain—a returned convict, for aught I know, but certainly a thief. Of course, I went up to him and knocked him down before her eyes, and then took her by the ear and kicked her half a street nearer home."

"And so got yourself into trouble, I suppose?"

"Not then. The villain had some shame in him, for he slunk off like a whipped dog; but women are different. They make less outcry, perhaps, but they're thinking all the time, and planning how to repay the insult with interest."

"Did she make any excuse?"

"A thousand. By her showing she was the most innocent, and wronged, and suffering martyr in the world. The gentleman, she said, was nobody but an acquaintance who had kindly agreed to conduct her to a friend's house, in which she had promised to spend the evening. I spoke of a divorce or separation, though, Heaven help me! I felt inclined for neither. I was anxious to believe her innocent, and so snatched at every

plausible lie as a godsend. But all the time she was planning my ruin. I suppose she knew that the thing would not much longer hide, and determined on a bold stroke. One night I saw, or thought I saw, the same handsome villain passing the house, and looking at it; but when I mentioned the circumstance to her, she brazenly laughed at me, said it was probably he I had seen, and ended by daring me to lay a finger on her. The words were so venomously spoken that my hand itched to obey and fell her before me; but something like a devilish sparkle in her eye stayed my hand. I seemed to read mischief in the very glitter, and let my hand drop, simply saying that from that moment she must consider herself no longer my wife—a state of matters which I was resolved to confirm legally at the earliest opportunity. Then she became more maddened than if I had struck her, and screamed and shouted, and finally struck me. I held back no longer then, and even with my bairn in the room, threw out my fist and felled her with one blow. When she got up she made a great fuss, and as she was bleeding freely from the nose, looked worse than she really was. Her cries had attracted a great crowd, and the police coming in, she charged me with attempting to murder her by strangling her, taking a razor and threatening to kill, pulling her about by the hair, and finally dashing her head against the wall.”

“Which was false, I suppose?”

“False as Satan!” hotly breathed Blake. “But what of that? The police could act only upon the evidence—I am not blaming them. I was taken away, of course, and bail refused, as she swore she was in terror of her life; and next day when I was charged, and pled not guilty, didn’t she bring a host of witnesses who saw the former assault, and among them her handsome lover, the result being that I was sent to prison for thirty days without the option of a fine, the punishment being made heavy by her artfully begging the Court not to be too hard upon me, as I was her husband!”

“I have seen such cases, but not often.”

“But I have not done yet,” excitedly pursued my visitor. “I thought that the worst was past; and, having resolved to procure a divorce as soon as I was set free, determined not to trouble myself about the temporary disgrace of confinement. I had it all planned—how I would go home straight from the prison and turn her out into the streets, and then defy her to interfere with me further, while I took steps to secure a divorce.

I gloated over the thought—smiled at it—hugged myself in delight, but I forgot that I was dealing with a woman. When I was released I went to my place of business, and was horrified to find it shut, with bills pasted all over, announcing that the entire stock would be sold by auction on a day then a fortnight past. Then I went home, and found it also shut and empty, and then some neighbours told me that my wife had left the place, taking my bairn with her, and in company with a gentleman whom I had no difficulty in recognising as her former handsome admirer. I believe I went mad then; at least they tell me of mad things I did. Of course, I informed the police; but what could they do? I had on marriage constituted my wife a sleeping partner in my business, so that she might be able to carry it on if I should be ill or absent, and they would not interfere, unless I could prove that the man—the villain who led her off—had had a hand in the pie, and himself stolen something. I told them he had stolen all I possessed—my bairn, above all—my happiness, my life; but they only looked pityingly, and said soothing things about seeing into it, if I would have patience. Patience! Oh, God! how could I have patience when my bairn was stolen? The fiend of a woman might have run off, and welcome. She might even have robbed me unquestioned, but she might have left me my lassie—all I thought worth living for.”

“Have you never heard of them since?” I inquired, after a pause to look away, so as to appear not to see his tears.

“Never till yesterday, when I got a message from the Central Office in Glasgow, saying that a man answering the description had been seen in the city that day, and that he was known to have taken a railway ticket for Edinburgh. I went to the Office at once, where they were very kind and sympathising—I was so much changed in the short time that they saw I had suffered—and then one of them, John Farrel by name, when I said I would come through here in the morning, told me to ask for you, and mention his name, and you would be sure to help me all in your power.”

“Ah, now I understand you,” I said, smiling out at the child-like trust and wistful eagerness, “but no recommendation from Johnny is needed from you. Your haggard face and grey hairs have done more for you than any friend’s word. It is written in your face that you have suffered.”

“I have suffered, and I suffer still,” he said, with a grateful clasp at my hand; “but if you only restore me my bairn, I shall

seek no more. I am poor now—the jade having taken everything, and left me only the heavy accounts to pay; but all I have is freely at your disposal.”

“Hush! I don’t want that,” I returned with a pained look; “but have you no clue to the guilty ones—no portrait of your wife, for instance?”

“I had a portrait of her taken shortly before we were married, but even if it had not been lost in the wreck of my home, it would be of no use to you,” he replied, with a weary look of sorrow. “Four years have changed her more than they have me. Drink ages quite as fast as care. But I have a portrait of my wee lassie, which I got taken only six weeks before the smash up. I have brought it with me, as she is really all I wish to recover.”

He took out a little folding case, and, opening it, placed before me the glass photograph of a little girl of some three years, with laughing eyes and light coloured hair, who, even on the dull and leaden photograph, looked so pretty and engaging that I involuntarily exclaimed—

“What a little beauty!”

“She is that!” chokingly responded the father, smiling gratefully at my undisguised admiration. “And as merry, and bright, and loving as a bairn could be. I tell you that child fairly wound herself round my heart in place of the mother, who has been lost to me for years, and when I woke up to find her stolen I thought the heart had been torn out of me. For four days and nights I did nothing but trail through the streets of Glasgow asking for her, searching every den or house likely to contain her, and never dreaming of sleeping or eating till I fairly dropped on the pavement. The police got to know me, and whenever I appeared would take the words out of my mouth and say, ‘We haven’t seen her yet, Mr Blake, but we’ll get her for you soon—very soon.’ Sometimes they had tears in their eyes, having perhaps bairns of their own. Ah, me! if I had known when I was married that it was to end in this, I should have jumped from Glasgow Bridge into the river and ended it all then.”

He paused there, and I might have replied to him, but, truth to tell, I had heard the last sentence but imperfectly, and was now holding out the child’s portrait at arm’s length with such a curious, puzzled expression, and new light on my face, that he exclaimed in surprise—

“Anything wrong, Mr M’Govan?”

"Nothing ; but it has just struck me that I have seen either this girl or a face like it very recently."

"Where? oh, where?" The words were thrown out with breathless eagerness and suspense, which was almost heart-breaking to have to look upon ; but puzzle myself as I liked, I could not recall the circumstances under which I had seen the young face and curly hair. I did not once think of the house with crimson blinds, which may appear very stupid to some, but was afterwards no surprising matter to me.

"I am sorry—I see so many faces," I stammered in apology, after a long pause ; "I may remember it by-and-by. But tell me what the man is like. He is more likely to come in my way than the child."

"Handsome and elegant as any gentleman in the land," was the bitter reply. "Always exquisitely dressed—wears a thick black moustache, slightly pointed and twisted at the ends, which gives him a military look. Always carries a silk umbrella with smooth ivory head, and wears a number of flashing gold rings on his fingers."

"Ah, I shall know him when we meet," I quietly returned ; "and as he is not likely to hide his beauty under a bushel, that will probably be before many days are gone, if he is still in Edinburgh. Once I see him I shall not let him out of sight till I trace out your lost ones, if he and they have not yet parted company."

We shook hands and parted after a little further conversation, he leaving the child's portrait in my care, with many cautions as to its safe keeping. I looked sharply for the handsome gentleman for some days, Mr Blake calling upon me at least once every day to learn the result, but I saw no one answering the description about our fashionable promenades. But an incident at this juncture came in my way which quickened my movements. As an example of a strange clue, as striking as it was simple, it is worth noticing in these sketches.

A woman appeared at the Office one evening as I was about to leave ; and as there was quite a throng in the "reception chamber," I lingered to take some of the cases off their hands. The woman had her head covered with a shawl ; but when I took her aside to learn her complaint, she removed the covering and showed a face and brow battered and bruised into an almost undistinguishable mass of swoollen and discoloured flesh.

"Ah, some one has ill-used you," I remarked, getting the

book ready and dipping a pen in ink. "What is your name, please?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then said boldly—

"Laura Brunton."

"Married?"

"Yes; married." The words were spoken in a choking burst, and with a depth of woful bitterness and despair which it is utterly impossible to put down on paper.

"Who assaulted you? Your husband?"

"A brute!" she vehemently answered, with a flash of the eyes, dimly discernible in her battered face, which showed that she was no common woman. "And it has not been once, but every day for months. I am one mass of bruises from head to foot. He would have killed me if he dared."

"Stop a moment, please, till I get another pen," I gently interposed, tugging out the used nib, which refused to let the ink flow, and looking in vain for another. I might have got one by disturbing those at the other desks, but, pressed for time, simply felt in my waistcoat-pocket for a pencil. In doing so, I found the pocket blocked by the folding case containing the child's photograph, which I quickly took out, and laid on the desk, till I should get the pencil below. The moment I had done so something like a hiss from the lips of the battered woman attracted my attention, and I saw that her eyes were fixed in a species of horror upon the little case, on the outside of which was the word "Georgina" in gilt old English lettering. To my surprise, at the same moment she hastily drew the shawl over her head, and began to back towards the door.

"Stay! don't run away till you have completed the charge," I cried; but she only shook her head, saying—

"It would do no good. Let me suffer; I deserve it all."

"You might have stayed away then, and saved our time," I sharply returned.

"I might; I wish to God I had!" and with these words passionately breathed she was gone. She was not ten minutes out of the Office till I started, and cried, "Good gracious!—did I ever believe that I could be so slow and thick-headed!"

The truth was that for the first time I had suspected a connection between the little portrait and the woman's sudden retreat, and now could only bite my nails over my carelessness in letting her out of sight. Mr Blake and I were out most of that night trying to follow up the clue, but without success. It is possible we might have traced out the missing woman

before long, but the next day brought us a new complaint, which did more for us than any yet placed in our hands.

A young gentleman, decidedly of the order known as "fast," appeared at the Office, accompanied by another, whom he introduced as "his lawyer."

"I have come to complain of being led into a house at the west end, near Coates Crescent, where I was induced to stake money at a roulette wheel, similar to those used on the Continent, till my money, and watch, and rings were gone. Then the proprietor, as I took him to be—the same who decoyed me to the place—accepted my I.O.U. for sum after sum, till I find that if I were to honour them I should be ruined."

"And you wish us to save you from that disagreeable task?" I dryly remarked. "Well, where is the house? What is the number?"

"I do not know the number, but it is easily distinguished, for it is the only one in the row fitted with crimson blinds. It is, in fact, neither more nor less than a gambling hell."

"Ah, I remember!" The words came out with more than ordinary excitement on my part, the truth being that there had flashed upon my mind not only my first curiosity regarding the house, but the face of the weeping child which I had seen tugged so sharply from the window. With that flash came a curious thought; and before saying another word I took the portrait from my pocket, scanned the features, and had my whole case clear cut to my hands.

"Did you see any woman about the house?" was my next inquiry.

"Only one besides the servant, and she had blackened eyes. I caught a glimpse, too, of a little girl about three or so; but I saw no——"

"I understand. I am glad you came. Was the decoy a handsome military looking gent, with profusion of rings on his fingers?"

"He is; and so ingratiating, I thought him a perfect gentleman—a lord at least," was the simple rejoinder.

"Ah, you are not the first who has thought that."

I said no more, but, after procuring the necessary authority, went out to the west end, picking up Mr Blake on the way, and merely saying I thought I had a clue. Arrived at the house with crimson blinds, we rang sharply, and were at length admitted by a slovenly Irish servant, who said that "the

masther was dressing, but would see us in a minute." We entered a dingy parlour at the front part of the house, and had scarcely done so when there wandered innocently in at the open door a little girl, who no sooner sighted Blake than she opened wide her arms with a scream of joy, and ran forward to clasp him tight round the neck.

"Oh, it's fazzer! it's my own fazzer!" she joyously articulated between every cuddle and kiss at his tear-wet face; and then, hugging her close in his arms, the demented father went dancing round the room, singing, laughing, and weeping by turns, till I began to fear that his brain was affected.

Shortly after, we invaded the bedroom of Mr Brunton, *alias* Joe Peglar, and handcuffed him before he could complete his shaving. He put on a bold front, defied us to touch him, and declared his intention of taking us to law for the insult; but when we turned out his pockets at the Office, and examined the magnificent gold watch there found, we discovered inside the back the following inscription:—

"To George Blake, from his loving wife on their marriage-day. MIZPAH."

Of the unfortunate woman we could find no trace; and Peglar, on being committed on a charge of robbery, even admitted, in a sullen way, that he had not seen her for a day or two. This did not disturb her husband, who fiercely declared that he would never look upon her face again. But in the course of the week she was picked up in a common stair in the Canongate, raving in *delirium tremens*, and forthwith carried to No. 10 ward in the Infirmary. She had one or two intervals of consciousness, but loudly screamed that she would not see her husband or her child, when the merest hint was thrown out.

Towards the end Blake relented so far as to go into the ward and look at her while she slept. She was much wasted and sunken, but Blake only covered his eyes with his hand, and said huskily—

"She's awful like what she was when I married her."

Thus she slumbered and slept till the end came, when she passed away without a word or a look for those she left behind; and Blake claimed the inanimate form, and had it quietly buried in a cemetery at the south side.

The handsome Mr Peglar, shortly after, was sentenced to a short imprisonment on the charge of robbery, at the end of which term he was taken to England on a more serious charge, which

gave him the comfortable term of fifteen years' penal servitude. I trust that, by the time that is finished, his beauty will be less killing, and his heart either softer or for ever still.

Blake himself is a happy man now, and as fortunate in his second marriage as he was luckless in the first. He has other children, too ; but I daresay his heart clings most fondly to her who in my hearing so joyously hailed him with the words. " Oh, it's fazzer ! it's my own fazzer ! "

THE DIAMOND-RINGED APPRENTICE.

WE had got hold of a woman "smashing," or passing base sovereigns in the High Street, and ran her in to see what she had about her. Of course we were disappointed. The woman had either pitched away all the "sinker" she carried, or, what is more likely, carried but one coin at a time, going back to her store, or getting a fresh one from some watchful satellite as she slowly changed the base gold into sterling silver. She professed to be very indignant at the charge, and said that we should hear from her lawyer in an hour or two; but as she had an English accent, and that brazen look which always stamps the professional criminal, we could afford to smile at the threat—the more so as she could not say where she had got the coin, and declined to tell how she lived, or whence she came.

As the case stood at the close of her examination we had absolutely no evidence that was likely to convict her; and it was unlikely that any other of the base coins would come in, as they were beautifully executed copies, which might have deceived even a bank teller, and would probably circulate unnoticed for some time. But the woman had spoken of sending a message to her husband, and employing a lawyer, and it instantly struck me that I might make something of the admission. Down I went to the draper whom she had attempted to victimise, and from him I learned that the woman had been seen speaking to a man—respectably attired in a brown overcoat and tall hat—shortly before entering the shop. The two had held a council of war, indeed, immediately in front of the windows, which some of the assistants had been dressing out. If I had but known this at the time of the woman's arrest, I might have caught him lingering in the wake of the crowd, or hanging on for signals from the prisoner, but there was no time to fume and fret over the loss. I must act promptly or lose him, and possibly the woman too.

At that time there was but one qualified law agent who had

the run of the Police Court cases, which are considered beneath the dignity of a respectable solicitor—though this gentleman had more cleverness in his head than many a half-dozen of these put together. The hint or threat of the woman regarding “a lawyer,” instantly directed my thoughts to this agent, whom I may call Mr Bellamy, and it struck me as not unlikely that the prisoner, during her conveyance to the Office, had telegraphed to her accomplice an intimation that he ought to seek the assistance of this sharp-witted gentleman.

I daresay little over an hour had elapsed between the arrest of the woman and my appearance at the office of Mr Bellamy; yet the moment he caught sight of my face and heard me say—“Was there a man here dressed in a brown top-coat and tall hat?” he laughed outright and answered—

“Aha, Mr M’Govan, you’re too late this time! The man has been here, and has engaged me to defend his wife, but I have sent him off in double-quick time to where not even you can ferret him out.”

“Imphm! That’s your opinion, of course—or what you’re paid for saying—but I may be excused for thinking different,” I dryly returned. “Did he pay you?”

“Did you think I would trust him?” laughingly returned the agent, taking out his purse and producing a sovereign for my inspection. “I am too old a bird for that.”

I snatched up the coin and examined it with great eagerness, the lawyer smilingly watching me the while, and then returned it to him in silence.

“Did you think for a moment that I would be fool enough to take a dummy?” he asked, with aggravating pleasantry. “No, no——”

“There is honour among thieves,” I said, finishing the sentence for him.

“Ill-natured, of course, because you’ve lost your man, and will lose the woman too,” he coolly retorted.

“You’re sure of that?”

“Quite. I mean to get her off,” was the confident reply; and as I knew he was not given to boasting, I mentally gave the woman up as lost.

“And will a sovereign pay you for all the trouble you will have?” I snappishly inquired.

“If it does not, I shall get more.”

“Oh, then, you know where to find the man?—you’ve got

his permanent address?" I pursued, trying hard to look innocent.

His answer was a knowing wink.

"It's no use, Mr M'Govan, *with me*," he at last observed. "Just take your defeat quietly, and hope for better luck next time."

"I'll get them yet," I said, rather savagely.

"Oh, well, through time you may; it's the fortune of war," he carelessly returned; "only this time you're done."

I could not admit that, and, agreeing to differ, we parted. The next morning the woman was placed at the bar of the Police Court, and charged with uttering base money with intent to defraud; but Mr Bellamy was there to make a pathetic appeal on her behalf, in which he stated that there was not a particle of evidence against the "poor woman," and so worked on the feelings of the Sheriff that she was discharged with a caution.

It happened, however, that we had been busy with the telegraph wires during the interval; and just as the agent was leading her out, a man arrived from Glasgow with a warrant for her apprehension on a similar charge.

"Not defeated yet, Mr Bellamy!" I triumphantly exclaimed, as I again laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Let me see your warrant," cried the quick lawyer, and then I knew we were done, as the warrant was for Lanarkshire alone, and to get another would take an hour at least.

"Tuts, that's a trifle which we can remedy in a few minutes," I said impatiently; but then the agent defied us on our peril to detain her a second longer, and we were forced to let her go.

The moment the woman was free she called a cab, by her agent's instructions, and drove down to Leith Railway Station, where she took out a ticket for Galashiels, which she paid for but did not use. Before the train started she had quietly slipped out of the station and tramped to Granton, where she took passage across the Forth, and vanished by a roundabout route in the wake of her husband. I was at the Railway Station two hours later with a proper warrant, and then telegraphed to Galashiels and every station on the way in vain. She had effectually thrown us off the scent, and we had just to grin and bear it.

But as yet the case had only begun, for the most extraordinary and mystifying part of it was to come.

Mr Bellamy, among his other employments, acted as a

collector of bad debts, and thus had at times a deal of money passing through his hands which was not actually his own. Not long after the escape of the woman, a client of his, who had just got a considerable sum through Mr Bellamy's agency, was paying the same into the bank, when the teller checked off no less than three sovereigns from the sum, which he declared to be counterfeit. The gentleman could not believe that they were bad, and took them back to Mr Bellamy, who was equally hard to convince. He tested them by ringing and a close examination, and then slowly admitted that they were spurious. He then took them back to the person from whom they were received in payment, but this man roughly declared that he knew nothing about them, but that they *were not* the coins paid away by him, which were not only good gold, but much older and more worn than the three produced. The solicitor was greatly enraged, and had he been anything but a lawyer, would doubtless have made a law case of it. How the business was settled I know not ; but some time after, in paying some court fees for a client, Mr Bellamy was again checked passing a bad sovereign. This time he was well laughed at, and chaffed so sorely that he was glad to take back the coin and say little about it, though he professed to be thoroughly mystified as to how it could have come into his possession. He was almost certain, he said, that he had got the coin among others at the bank, in getting gold for a five-pound note ; but as he could not prove it, was forced to bear the loss. Still another case occurred, by a client presenting two of the bad sovereigns at the same bank, which he said had been paid him by Mr Bellamy ; and this time the bank authorities, becoming suspicious, not only retained the coins, but consulted me. Mr Bellamy, from constantly appearing for the defence of criminals, had not the best reputation in the eyes of these gentlemen. What was to hinder him, when he had all the sources at his command, doing a little crime on his own account ? That was how they put the case to me, and in spite of many an old grudge, I should have laughed at the insinuation against the solicitor's character, had it not been for one apparently trifling circumstance. The coin tendered by the female "smasher" was still in our possession ; and remembering my own suspicions of the retaining fee of Mr Bellamy, I turned to this, and found that in date, make, and appearance, the detected coins exactly resembled this original counterfeit. The coins, I may here say, were obviously not

the work of a novice—they were so carefully got up and finished, that they could not have been sold wholesale at less than five shillings each. It was quite clear, indeed, that they were the work, not of one man with a few rude tools, but of an expert gang, commanding every appliance for their evil trade.

After a good deal of consultation, I thought I would go down and see Mr Bellamy at his office.

The moment the solicitor saw me, he said—

“I could swear I know what has brought you.”

“Out with it, then.”

“Bad sovereigns.”

“Yes; what do you know about them?”

“I know absolutely nothing but that they are being palmed upon me in some mysterious fashion which beats me to fathom,” he said with great earnestness. “I have just found one in my purse, and I have three in my desk which were checked the other day.”

“But it is not these I come about,” I quietly observed. “How did you know I came about that?”

“I don’t know—I just read it in your face, I think,” he carelessly answered. “What is it? Some more I’ve been paying away?”

“It is;” and then I told him of the coins being stopped at the bank, and how I had been called in.

“That’s because H——, the head of that branch, has a pique at me,” he angrily remarked, when I had finished. “But never mind—I can afford to laugh at him. But I think you have a theory of your own. Out with it, plump and plain, and I’ll be as candid with you.”

His manner was so unlike that of a guilty man that I ventured to comply, and bringing out the coin of the female smasher and those checked at the bank, I pointed out that they were identical in make and finish. As soon as I had done so, he took one from his purse and three from his desk, and compared them closely, and said—

“You’re right—they’re all from one die and one manufactory; but how on earth have they got into my possession?”

“That’s just what I want to find out,” I gravely answered. “Have you never heard from those two smashers since yon?”

“I have, once. They were rather grateful, I suppose, to me for the neat way I tugged them out of your clutches, and they sent me another fee as an extra.”

"Oh, indeed? Was it paid in gold?"

"It came to me in the form of a Post Office order. I thought that was your line of search; but I've been too careful to get swindled in that manner. Besides, it is not two, but perhaps twenty sovereigns which may have been palmed on me. How could it be done? I tell you it's a mystery to me."

"Are you quite sure of the people you got the money from?"

"Oh, quite. There's no doubt whatever about them; besides, to let you into a secret, the bad money has been brought in not from one person, but from several."

"By you?"

"Oh, no; I don't bother with that. My oldest clerk, John Lyle, does that."

"Then he must be the criminal."

"That is absolutely impossible," said Mr Bellamy, with slow emphasis.

"Why?"

"Because, in the first place, he is an old and tried man, of staunch integrity; and, in the second place, there is no possibility of him knowing anything of the makers of these coins. When the man was here, Lyle was at home ill."

"You are sure you never mentioned these queer clients of yours to him, or got him to write a letter to them?"

"Quite; and the address is not even written down. I carry all these delicate matters in my head."

"How is it that such a shrewd and trusted fellow has been twice taken in with bad money?"

"I don't know—neither does he—though he is greatly distressed about it. It's a mystery to us both, and if you clear it up, I'll promise never to laugh at you again."

"That's very kind of you," I said, with a bit of a sneer. "Perhaps the laughing will be all on my side. What would you say if I took you away with me on a charge of uttering base money?"

"It would be a great joke," he answered.

"Not to you," I returned, with more seriousness than he had shown. "Really, mind you, I don't know but it may come to that. I'm bound to grab at somebody, and can't be blamed for taking the one nearest my hand."

"Now, don't be spiteful, for if you are you will certainly do something foolish. Take the one nearest your hand, certainly, but first decide who he is. It is not I, for you can see that I have been the chief sufferer."

We talked in this strain for some time, during which I learned that John Lyle, the trusted clerk, often brought in quite a large sum after banking hours, and consigned it to the safe till next morning. To this safe there was but one key, and this, along with some others, remained in Lyle's possession by day, and was handed to Mr Bellamy at night. Upon some rare occasions, however, Lyle took the keys home with him.

I had no particular thought in view in laying bare these facts; but one significant discovery came out of the inquiries—all the money which had been found to be base had been in the safe; not always for a night—sometimes for but an hour or two—but in every instance the coins had come out of the safe cash drawer. Lyle was an old and experienced cash collector, and careful to a fault in examining the money tendered him to test its genuineness. How, then, came it that real gold, or gold supposed to be real, no sooner went into the safe, even for an hour, than it became spurious? It was the old story of the philosopher's stone reversed; *it* changed base metal to gold, the safe not only changed gold to base metal, but, more wonderful still, changed it into coins manufactured in a certain secret mint in England, the locality of which was known only to Mr Bellamy. Frankly, I may say at this stage, in spite of his coolness, I thought the solicitor the guilty one. I decided, it is true, to see the Fiscal and the Superintendent before taking action, but I felt almost certain that he would be in jail in a few hours. But just then an incident so trifling stepped in to save him, that I almost hesitate to put it down.

I had gone into the front office with Mr Bellamy and examined the wonder-working safe, and questioned John Lyle at the same time, when the office door opened, and a young whipper-snapper of a clerk came in with a cigar in his mouth, a cane twirling in his hand, and a diamond ring flashing on one of his fingers. I thought he was a customer or client, till I saw him place his monkey-headed cane reverently in the umbrella stand, hang up his hat, and take his place at a desk, after loftily tossing the half cigar into the fire.

"A fast youth that," was my mental comment, as I returned to the back room with Mr Bellamy. Just as I was passing from the one room to the other, an idea struck me which made me start and for a moment stand stock still in the doorway. I think Mr Bellamy noticed the curious look, and was about to inquire into the cause, when I stopped him by closing the door and saying in an undertone—

"Have you any more clerks coming in?"

"No; why?"

"Could you send that young lad out for a moment till I test something?"

"Certainly;" and the order was given accordingly, though not without surprise, and the diamond-ringed gentleman was sent an errand to the end of the street—religiously taking with him his familiar spirit, the monkey-headed cane.

"Now, just one question—did the husband of that female smasher tell you his story in this room?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak loud or low?"

"Pretty loud—I think he is a little deaf himself."

"Good; and who was in the outer office at the time?"

"Oh, nobody in particular; Mr Lyle was absent, ill, at the time."

"Then who showed him in?"

"Oh, just that young lad—the apprentice."

"The fast youth with the diamond ring?"

"Yes."

"He'll have a big salary, I suppose—three or four pounds a-week?"

"Get away, man! what do you think I'm made of? He gets exactly fifteen pounds a-year, and jolly well paid, I think."

"Friends wealthy?"

"Well, no; not particularly; but you know if people will have their sons brought up to a genteel profession, they must be prepared to make some sacrifice for it."

"Seems a smart fellow?"

"He is. He'll be a 'cute one, I can tell you, when he passes."

"Now, would you be kind enough to call in Mr Lyle, and say something to him in a tone of voice as nearly pitched to that of your queer client as you can remember?"

With just a dawning idea of my meaning breaking out on his face, the solicitor complied; and Lyle and I changed places, with the door closed between us.

Sitting at the desk used by the diamond-ringed gentleman, I found that I could hear that some one was talking in the next room, and no more; but on leaving the desk, and applying my ear to the key-hole, of course I heard every word distinctly. One significant circumstance during this test did not escape my eye

—the safe, during the whole time I had been in the office, had stood unfastened with the keys hanging from the lock.

I returned to the inner room, and quietly asked Mr Bellamy to go over, as near as possible, all that had passed between him and the queer client during the visit. This he hesitated to do, till I convinced him it was to save himself that I wished for the information, and that without it I might be absolutely helpless. The account of the interview was briefly thus :—The man had come in in a shuffling way, and said vaguely that his wife had got into trouble passing some bad money, and he wanted her got off; to which Mr Bellamy, after receiving his fee, promptly replied by advising him to be off as quickly as he could, unless he knew a safe hiding-place in the city. He then told him to walk to Corstorphine, and there take a ticket for Glasgow; then to get out, not in the city, but the first station from it, and walk the remaining distance, after which he was to cross the city and take train at the first station on the other side, and there make his way to England. Hull was the town he hailed from, and thither he meant to make his way, as the “factory” of which he was the chief partner had its headquarters there.

Of this “factory” or base-coining den he gave a clear and lively description, and then ended by saying that, though for prudent reasons he could not reveal the exact spot on which it was situated, Mr Bellamy could always hear of him, or send word about his wife, by addressing him at a certain house in Hessel Road.

As soon as the account was finished, I primed Mr Bellamy in the part I wished him to play, and got him to send the old clerk Lyle out on business, leaving only our diamond-ringed young friend in the outer office, to which he had returned during the narration.

I found the fast youth busy at his desk, and, carefully closing the door of the inner room, I made for the outer door, and then suddenly paused and listened.

“Isn’t that Mr Bellamy calling you?” I said to the apprentice.

“He never calls; he rings,” loftily replied that young gentleman.

To which I gravely answered—

“I’m sure I heard a voice; put your ear to the key-hole just to oblige me, and tell me what you hear.”

The lad stared at me open mouthed, and then complied, thinking me mad, I have no doubt.

But the moment his ear was pressed to the key-hole, he heard—and I heard too—the astounding words from within—

“If you want to send me any news or any message, address me at ‘Ralph Hutchin’s, Hessel Road, Hull.’”

As the words fell on his ear the lad’s eyes met mine, and in an instant his face underwent a series of flashing changes. First it was red, then white, then red again, as fast as one could have waved a hand before his face.

“What’s the matter? what’s wrong?” I kindly inquired, seating myself on one of the high stools, and keeping my eyes fixed on his face; but he seemed to have no explanation to offer, so I took out one of the base sovereigns I had brought with me, and quietly holding it up between my finger and thumb, I said to him—

“Here is a brand new sovereign, fresh from the coiner’s hands—would you be good enough to take it to the cash drawer in that safe and change it for any old or worn-looking sovereign you can find there? See, the keys are in the lock—it’ll be quite easy.”

The flashing changes in colour ceased on the face as I spoke, and he remained ghastly pale, with beads of perspiration breaking slowly from his temples. Still, he tottered manfully forward, as if to take the coin from my hand and brave the thing out, when I quickly changed the coin for the handcuffs, saying—

“I think I will give you these instead. You can keep your diamond-ring on till you get to the Office, but you may leave your monkey-headed cane behind, as it is of no value, and they don’t use such things in prison.”

As I spoke Mr Bellamy came forth with the words—

“Is it all right, Mr McGovan?” and the mention of the name seemed to complete the effect. The miserable boy covered his face with his hands, and began to howl and blubber like a child ordered up for a caning. He persisted in not confessing, however, though earnestly urged to do so by his employer; so I had to take him away with the degrading symbols of crime on his wrists. At the Office he was searched, and one base sovereign found in his purse of the same stamp as those already detected. Then I went to his home, and, by searching his room very rigidly, I found not only a small packet of the spurious coins, but a brief and business-like “memorandum” from the makers, in which they acknowledged receipt of Post Office order for one dozen of “patent lozenges,” which were

herewith sent as per order. The moment I read this note, it struck me that I might make something of it. Accordingly, before any noise could be made in the papers about the arrest, and without even trusting a message to the telegraph, I started for Hull the same afternoon, and there spent three days, in conjunction with the authorities and sharpest men on the staff, in laying a trap for the clever coiners. During that time the boy Grieve had come to his senses in prison, and was induced to write a note to the coiners, enclosing a Post Office order, and asking for a fresh supply of "patent lozenges." This note was carefully followed from the letter-carrier's hands to that of a man answering the description given me by Mr Bellamy of his queer client. We could have arrested him there and then, it is true, but we aimed at a bigger haul, and accordingly we had him tracked and watched during the whole of the afternoon, during which he never once went near any suspicious haunts.

At night, however, he was less guarded, and went boldly to a house in an obscure and dirty part of the town near the water-side, which he approached and entered with such caution that we had no hesitation in sending at once for the relay of picked men waiting in readiness at the Central. The den was speedily surrounded and the doors smashed in, when we secured the whole gang but one, who leaped from an upper window sheer down into the water, and so escaped.

The coining implements were taken with them, and among the gang I was pleased to find my old acquaintance the female smasher, who did not seem equally delighted to meet me. But gratitude and criminals are always far apart. The whole batch were tried shortly after, and sentenced to various terms of penal servitude, some handsome compliments being paid to me at the time of their capture. The diamond-ringed lad Grieve was taken up and accepted as evidence against the gang, and thus escaped the punishment for which he had booked himself. He remained in England, and probably changed his name, so it is to be hoped it was a life-lesson to him.

THE UMBRELLA MENDER'S QUEST.

It was at the Night Asylum for the Houseless, down the close beside our Central Police Office, that I first met the old umbrella mender. Even now I seem to see the great dark room, with his gaunt figure, seamed face, and straggling white hair shining out like a halo from the centre of the rows of hard beds and brutal faces. It was after twelve o'clock on a chill November night, and I had gone down purposely late to look for a thief I was expecting from Newcastle. The attendant took me into the men's dormitory without a word, and I turned back the slide of the lantern I carried, and shone the bright glare slowly over the sleeping faces. My man was not there—had not arrived yet—perhaps was even then toiling manfully along some bleak road, thinking himself very clever, and hurrying to have the pleasure of meeting me at the end of the way.

But the streaking silver of the old man's hair caught the yellow glare of the lantern, and attracted me to the side of the owner with a curious interest. Rogues and waifs, you see, seldom have silver hair—they mostly die off long before the age when that crown of glory is awarded to humanity. And then crime was not written on that patient face—only care and wearing thought. I bent over the sleeper, and saw that his withered hands were outside the coverlet, and moving spasmodically—one clutching the miserable bundle of old umbrellas and tools with which he had refused to part on entering, and the other clutching the coverlet madly, as if a life depended on him not letting it go. The old man's body was asleep, but his mind was active in dreams. I turned the slide of the lantern half forward to lessen the glare on his eyes, and listened to the groaning whisper coming from his lips.

"Don't, Bob, lad! don't turn a thief, and I will work for thee till my fingers be worn to t' bone," he murmured in passionate entreaty, speaking in the homely tones of the Newcastle dialect. "Where has he gone to? I wonder if I could find t' poor lad? I don't mind the long road, and the rain

and wind. Hush, lad, thou's got money now ; I've got it all, and thou won't need to thief any more. Come whome wi' me, lad—do come whome wi' thy owdt feyther. Ah, 'twas cruel ; but the drink made him do it. I wonder where the poor lad's gone." And with a deep sigh he turned uneasily on the hard bed.

"Queer old fellow that," remarked the attendant. "Speaking in his sleep, I s'pose. He wouldn't take the regular supper, but was content to chew a mouldy old crust and then turn in. Said he wasn't a beggar or a tramp yet, thank God ; he was an honest man, working his way and living off no one, but would be glad of a shelter, as it was cold in the streets. Seems a decent-looking fellow. Not one of your bairns, is he?"

"I think not," I gravely answered. "But see, you are waking him up."

The old man opened his eyes and started bolt upright, with a scared and anxious expression on his face, that would have suited a rogue who was "wanted" better than an honest man.

"What ! Who is this?" he cried in a frightened gasp, indicating my grave face and flashing lantern.

"Only a detective—Mr M'Govan—looking over the company," answered the attendant, rather respectfully.

But the old man was only half awake, or had perhaps not yet half shaken off the effect of his dreams, for he turned to me with an anguished expression and clasped hands, and cried eagerly—

"A detective !—oh, sir, you won't be hard on him—you won't be hard on poor Bob—he doesn't mean to do ill, I'm sure ; only the drink and the bad company led him to it—dear, dear ! what am I thinking of?—I must have been dreaming. I thought it was we're Bob you were after."

A quiver shook his voice at the word "Bob," and he turned abruptly away from the light and drew the coverlet closer over his spare form. I gently reassured him in a few hastily uttered words, and then, closing the lantern, softly left the place.

I cannot understand even yet why I was so interested in the old man, but I found myself dreaming of him during the greater part of the night, instead of sleeping soundly to prepare me for the work of the next day ; and so on the following morning, when I was standing at the close-mouth with some of our staff, and saw the familiar, slender figure slowly totter up the close bearing the bundle of tools and old umbrellas, it seemed quite that of an old acquaintance.

The old man's eyes, as he paused at the close-mouth, wandered hungrily over every face in sight, and at last his glance met my own. He was thinly clad, though not in rags; and the cold raw wind rushing up the High Street from the east seemed strong enough to tumble him into the grave. He smiled dubiously, as if half recognising me; then advancing, said—

"Good morning, sir! I think you are Mr M'Govan, who saw me down there last night? I hope I'm not troubling you; but I was asking the man down there about you, and I think maybe you might be able to help me in something."

"No trouble at all; I shall be glad to assist you in any way in my power," I said, shaking the cold, withered hand so timidly presented, to give him time to get back some degree of firmness to his voice, which had become strangely agitated.

"It's about my son I want to speak," he said, as he drew me aside, and we walked off together into the quiet retirement of Parliament Square. "He was the only one left after my wife dee'd, and my heart was set on him, for he was the youngest, and all the others are sleepin' wi' their mother in St Nicholas' Churchyard."

He paused there, fingering feverishly with the umbrellas; but I did not look at his face, for I guessed that there was something there which I did not wish to see.

"You understand these things, sir; for I've been told you've listened to many a tale of the kind," he brokenly continued. "It seems that some men get a large share of sorrow and trouble, and others a little 'un; mine has been a large 'un; but I don't complain, if I could only find Bob, and speak to 'un, and grip 'un by the hand, and say to 'un, 'Bob, lad, thou's been left money—I've got it sewed in my coat lining—fower hundred and seventy pounds—come whome wi' me lad, an' don't be a wanderin' thief and a vagabond any more.'"

"He went wrong, then?" I gently observed, as he drew his worn sleeve across his eyes, unable to articulate more.

"He did, sir, and a sad heart it ga'e me. At first it was only drinkin', or fightin' an' quarrellin', and I got 'un off by payin' the fines. Then he got to coursin' hares wi' dogs on Sundays, and got mixed wi' thieves and such-like. The police are sharp our Newcastle way. They have to be; and he was ta'en wi' some thieves, and got thirty days, and no fine would get him off—though I'd sold my whole shop to make it up."

"I warn't a poor wanderin' man then, more like a beggar

nor anything else," pursued the old man, after a pause, with some dignity. "I had a shop o' my own, and a good trade in toys and papers and such-like. I sold umbrellas, too, and mended them at times, and that's how I took to it, after the money came to Bob."

"Then he was really left money?"

"Yes, sir; but that was long after he first went wrong—I'm not come to that yet," answered the old man. "When the thirty days wor up, I went to Carliol Square and waited from eight in the morning at the jail door to see him come out. 'Twas the dead of winter, and awful cold, but the thought of Bob coming out to me made me as warm as a pie. So I rubbed my hands and kept walking up and down from the Manors to Erick Street, in front of the doorway, thinking how nice it would be sitting at whome takin' breakfast wi' Bob alongside o' me just as usual. But before the door opened to let him out, there were others there—dog men and thieves—and they got round him and whispered to him, and he only pulled away when I spoke to him, and at last he up wi' his fist and struck I an awful blow in the eyes."

"The brute—and you gave him in charge again, of course?"

"Na, I cudn't do that. I didn't mind the clip on the face a bit, but my heart was nigh breakin' at him goin' away, and I followed him a bit till he turned round and said, 'If I came any farder, he would throw me i' Tyne.' I said, 'Well, well, Bob, lad, thou may be sorry on it some day;' and I went whome to my empty fireside mysen, wishin' I wor asleep in the churchyard wi' my wife and bairns."

The short and shabby sleeve was again drawn across his eyes, and again I studied the clock of St Giles' church till he should be able to speak again.

"From that day, sir, the devil seemed to get into him, and send him driving from bad to worse," softly resumed the old man. "He wor seldom at home, and I was frightened to ask him how he lived, lest I should find him as bad as I feared. He wor always drinkin', and so furious that at times he thowt nothin' o' beatin' me. I didn't mind that a little bit, for you know I loved the lad. He robbed me twice, but I said nothing about it to the police, for what good was there in sending him back to jail to learn more wickedness? Once when he was awful wild he struck me with the poker and broke my arm; but I went up to the Infirmary and had it set, and no one knew nowt about it. Then I had to give up my shop and get a living

as best I could, and I lost sight of him, for he was now going about the country robbin' whoever he could. He was often in the jails, as you may have heard, and was called 'Rattling Bob, the Newcastle Mumper.'"

"Newcastle Bob! Ah, I've heard of him, and seen him too," I answered with quickened interest. "A clever rascal, but rash—rash as fire."

"You've seen him!—where? when? was it here? lately?" breathlessly burst forth the old man in trembling eagerness. "Oh, I've been looking for him so long—this three year and more! Tell me where I can find him?"

I shook my head sadly.

"I wish I could, but he is not in Edinburgh now, so far as I am aware. He generally haunts race-courses, and may be in Glasgow, or the other end of England for that matter."

The light died out of the old man's face—he shivered a little, and then resumed—

"A year or two after he left me—or rather after I lost sight of him—a letter came to me one day saying my sister in America was dead an' left him—that was Bob—all her money—fower hundred and seventy pounds. I cudn't believe the news, but after a while the money came, and I sewed it all in t' linin' o' my coat, and set off to look for him. I didn't need much to keep me alive, and so I took to the road as a umbrella man; for, says I to mysen, 'I'll find him now, and he'll turn square and do what's right.' Afore I took to the road I spent a good many shillin's I'd saved on advertisements in t' papers, sayin' it wor all forgiven, and to come whome to his father, who had good news for un; but if he seed them papers he must have thowt 'em lies, for he never came nor never answered."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Never once, sir. I've heard of him often from the characters he goes wi', and many a kindly message I've left for him. If tears would wash out his sins, I've shed enough to make him white. But I've never found him, and all the money lying idle, and waiting him putting out his hand."

"And have you never needed the money for your own wants?" I asked, more deeply moved than I cared to show.

"I've needed it often, for the world isn't near so good and generous as some think," he bravely answered. "But the money is his, not mine, and it may save him through all time and eternity. No, sir; I would drop dead on t' road afore I would spend a farthing of it. He shall have it all—all to begin

a new life with. I sometimes think it can't be so very long now till I find him. I've travelled a weary way looking for him; but when I was hungry, or wet, or cold, or faint, I just said to mysen, 'P'raps Bob is at the end o' t' road—cheer up, Geordie; thou shanna dee till thou sees thy son and saves him!' ”

There are not many heroes in this world; but I must confess that as I looked down on the slender figure, white hair, and thinly-clad form of this old umbrella-mender, I said to myself—“Well, he has taken the scales from my eyes—here is a hero, if ever there was one on earth, though he appears in strange guise.”

I shook him by the hand again, gave him a few words of encouragement and advice as to the places in Edinburgh where he was likely to hear of his son's whereabouts, and then turned away to my own business, while the old man moved off, looking sharply and eagerly into every strange face, as if saying to himself, “I know I shall meet Bob soon—it can't be very long now till I find him.”

I did not go away and straightway forget all about him. The simple relation of all his troubles had taken a firmer hold of me than many a more wonderful tale that had preceded it, and I made every inquiry and search in my power towards ascertaining his whereabouts. I often met the old man, too, moving about the low quarters of the city, always with the same eager and expectant look on his worn features, and always tottering manfully on, though seemingly wearied enough to drop and die by the way. But a month passed away, and I not only failed to hear of the son, but at length lost sight of the old man himself, and finally concluded that he had given Edinburgh up in despair and wandered off to some other city.

About this time one of the Leith Police, in moving through St Andrew Street one morning at an early hour, found a man lying in an insensible state underneath the windows of a house having anything but a good reputation. The man was not above twenty-five, well-dressed, and not bad-looking, but the mark of Cain—the stamp of crime—was on his brow; and, though his eyes were closed, the policeman at the first glance at the face said—

“A strange thief—got into hot quarters—bleeding at the mouth and covered with snow. I wonder if he has been thrown out of one of them windows!”

The officer glanced up at the windows above, but, of course,

they were all demurely closed, and told no tale. Then he touched the prostrate form, to make sure that it had not stiffened with the frost into a pulseless corpse; and then, finding that the man still breathed, he sprang his rattle for assistance, and had him carried, in the first instance, to the Police Office, and then to the Hospital. The medical report there was to the effect that the man was in a very precarious condition, and suffering not only from the effects of exposure and, perhaps, a fall, but from *delirium tremens* as well, and that his recovery was more than doubtful. Thus stimulated, the Leith detective set to work to trace out the guilty parties, believing that the case might eventually resolve itself into a charge of murder against some person at present unknown. Three persons were arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the crime; but these stoutly denied throwing the man out of the window, and to that statement they firmly adhered, though kept in separate cells. According to these three—two women and one man—the injured man had taken up his abode in the house some time before, with “lots of money” in his possession; but had drank so hard and got so “mad” that there was no living with him, and many quarrels were the result. At last, on the night before he was picked up, he got outrageous, and tried to cut off the head of one of the women with a table-knife. The proprietor interfered, and there was a long struggle for the knife, during which the man was forced, in self-defence, to give his infuriated lodger a blow in the mouth with his clenched fist, which caused his gums and nose to bleed freely. Then the three succeeded in bundling the madman out to the stair, and down to the street, where they kicked him over in the snow, and left him “to sleep it off.”

Now this explanation, though it had a plausible appearance, by no means satisfied the Leith detectives, and after repeated efforts to overturn and undermine the statements, they came up to Edinburgh to get my advice and opinion on the subject. In the course of their description they had occasion to mention the name of the man found as “Robert Findlay,” otherwise “Newcastle Bob.” Then I started joyfully.

“You do not mean to say that it is the ‘Mumper?’—the racecourse mobsman?—Rattling Bob?” I exclaimed; and then being assured of his identity, I added—“Well, I would have given anything to have known that a month ago. I met his poor old father on the search for him, but now that I’ve found the prodigal, I do not know where to find the father.”

I dismissed the men with the promise that I would come down to Leith and see the injured man, and inquire fully into the case; but it chanced that for two days I was more than usually busy, and so could not redeem my promise. At the end of that time the following note was brought up from Leith Hospital, and placed in my hands:—

“Dear Sir,—

“I have heard from a policeman that you have met my father and spoken to him. I am lying here ill, and the doctor says I may die. Would you come and see me, and tell me what my poor old father said?

“ROBERT FINDLAY,

“*per* Joseph Jackson,

“Missionary.”

I ran out of the Office with the note in my hand—caught the Leith ’bus above the Tron just starting, and in half-an-hour was at the hospital. I was shown at once to a bed enclosed by a screen, and there I found a shadow of a man, white as the sheets on which he lay, propped up with pillows, and lying back with eyes half closed, as if weary of life and longing to be away. The doctor sat at one side, with his finger on the patient’s wrist, while at the other side was the missionary who had penned the note to me, just closing the Bible from which he had been reading. The sound of my step on the floor, though light and hushed, caused the sick man to start and open wide his eyes; and then the doctor bent over him soothingly, saying, “This is the gentleman who spoke to your father. Are you strong enough to speak to him?”

“Oh, yes,” whispered the shadow with the utmost eagerness; “tell him to come close, as I can’t raise myself.”

I did as requested, and then he whispered—

“Tell them to go away for a minute—I want to speak to you alone.”

The missionary and doctor softly retired, and then he grasped my hand with an unnatural strength, and whispered—

“My poor owdt feyther!—what did he say of me?”

“Nothing but good. He said he loved you and would search for you as long as he could put one foot before the other, and bring you back home and live happy with you on the money left you by your aunt.”

“What! did he forgie me?—did he not tell thee I broke his heart?”

“Not once. He has travelled over the whole country looking for you. He has money too—above four hundred pounds,

left you by your aunt—sewed up in the lining of his coat—to give you, to wean you from crime and start you in an honest life.”

He leant back in silence and closed his eyes, and through the closed lids I could see tears slowly force their way. There was a long silence, and the ticking of my watch seemed to make quite a noise. At length he opened his eyes and said—

“The missionary says you have seen many like me taken ill in the midst of their sin.”

“Very many,” I answered, with a shake of the head.

“Hush! come closer! Did they stop goin’ wrong when they got round again, and try a new way o’ doin’?”

The question was so eagerly and breathlessly put, that I turned away in silence, not wishing to chill his hopes.

“Ah, I see what you would say—they seldom change their ways,” he said, with a bright look. “Well, I’m glad I’m not to get better. It’s better to die thus when I’m at peace with every one. You will see my father again, perhaps? You could not bring him here?”

I looked in his wan and wasted face, and hesitated over the answer.

“If I should find him, I might bring him——”

“Yes—yes—don’t speak much till I have done,” he said with a mighty effort. “I feel as if I won’t have long to speak. You will try to see my father again, or find him out, and tell him——”

He was sinking back, and the words seemed to freeze on his lips.

“Yes, yes! what shall I say?”

“Tell him the missionary came to me like a blessing—that I died peaceful and happy, and that——”

Again the words died away, and I gently moistened his lips with the wine at the bedside.

“That—Bob—will—meet—him in heaven.”

The faint whisper ceased, a smile passed over his white lips, then a slight spasm, and then, getting alarmed, I hastily motioned to the doctor.

“I think he has taken a relapse,” I said, with my heart almost standing still.

The doctor touched his wrist, looked in his face, and then turned sadly away.

“He has, indeed,” he gravely answered. “He is gone.”

That same night I went to the newspaper offices, and saw

that the following advertisement was set up for the morrow's paper :—

"George Findlay, a travelling umbrella mender, and native of Newcastle, who was in Edinburgh a month ago, may hear news of his son by applying to Detective M'Govan, Police Office, High Street, Edinburgh."

On the forenoon of the day that this advertisement appeared I received the following message from the governor of the Poorhouse in Forrest Road :—

"City Poor House, Christmas Day.

"Dear Sir,—

"I have just read your advertisement in to-day's paper, and beg to say that an old man, calling himself George Findlay, and a native of Newcastle, was brought into this house some days ago by two persons who found him sleeping in the snow. We have been thinking of sending him to Newcastle, but he is not yet quite strong enough to be removed. In these circumstances, perhaps you could make it convenient to come out and see him."

I went back with the bearer of the note. It was a clear frosty morning, and the streets were alive with gaiety and mirth, but none of it found an echo in my breast. The news I bore had neither smiles nor mirth about it, and at that moment I believe I would rather have faced the most desperate criminal in Edinburgh single-handed, than have to look on the patient, eager face of the old umbrella mender.

At the Poorhouse I was conducted through the old men's ward by a querulous old woman, from whom I learned that the old man was "very low."

"He has queer ways, too," she added. "He would hardly take off his clothes when they brought him in, and shouted out that we wanted to rob his son Bob, and at last we were forced to let him sleep with his old shabby coat folded up under his pillow like a treasure. He is rather down-hearted, and will hardly speak to any one, or say if he's any better, unless you ask him if he'll soon be able to look for his son, when he's sure to say, 'Ay, I mun try an' be out to-morrow—yes, I'll be stronger to-morrow.'"

"Is he *very* weak?" I asked.

"Weak as a child, sir—can hardly lift an arm from the bed," was the emphatic reply. "But you know this is Christmas Day, and he's to get a glass of wine, and some roast beef and plum-pudding, and that'll put some strength in him—that'll cheer up his old heart and make a new man of him. Oh, we'll have a merry Christmas, though he is dull at times."

We reached the old man's bed as she spoke, and I motioned her to leave. The old man's eyes were closed; and to make him aware of my presence, I bent over him and said—

"A merry Christmas to you, and a happy New Year when it comes!"

He started, and not recognising me rightly, said mechanically—

"The same to you, sir."

Then he opened his eyes wider, started upright in bed, and tremblingly seized my hand—

"It's the Detective!" he quivered out, bending over my hand to kiss it, and hide the tears rushing to his eyes. "I thowt you would come! I dreamt of you comin' last night, and you browt we're Bob wi' you, and he seemed so handsome and kindly-like. Oh, sir, speak! What news o' t' lad?"

"I have news," I said, in grave tones that drove every drop of blood from his face. "Bear up strongly, for it is not the news you expect."

He sank slowly back to the pillow, but still kept his eyes riveted on my face, and motioned madly for me to go on.

"Your son died yesterday in Leith Hospital. He had been taken there after lying exposed to snow and frost for a whole night in Leith, after being put out of a house mad with drink."

"Dead! dead!" Only two words, but the anguished cry was that of a breaking heart.

"Not dead, but gone before," I hastily added, bending closer over the white and rigid face. "He had sunk slowly—had seen the missionary every day—and left me a message for you."

"Ay, we're Bob—dear lad!—a message?" he murmured.

"Yes, he said he would meet you in heaven."

The old man's face underwent a sudden change—a smile trembled on the lips; and then, though the eyes remained closed, I heard him murmur with soft ecstasy—

"Ah, I've found we're Bob at last!—the money won't be needed now, but, thank God for His mercy, I've found my lad—I've found my boy, and I'll never be unhappy no more! A merry Christmas, Bob, lad!—a merry Christmas—and—and——"

A wild clutch of the withered hands, a long gurgling breath, and the sounds died away and I stood alone. The old man was dead, and had found his son. They were holding their Christmas in heaven!

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